



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

March 3 to May 8, 2014
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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker



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Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 3, 2014

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC)
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Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
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Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 60

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

Independent: 1

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Fiona Vance, Sessional Parliamentary Counsel	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
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	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
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Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

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Cao	Pastoor
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Hehr	Sarich
Luan	Strankman
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Amery	Eggen
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Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

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Bikman	Khan
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Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Monday, March 3, 2014

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated February 26, 2014, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members and assembled guests, let us pray. Almighty God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for Your blessings on those present here today. We ask for Your guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments, our thoughts, and our actions for the true benefit of all Albertans. Amen.

Ladies and gentlemen, may we please remain standing for the rendering of our national anthem, which will be sung today by Mr. Robert Clark. Please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clark and all. A very lively and welcoming rendition of *O Canada*.

Please be seated.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm honoured to inform you that the Royal Canadian Artillery Band – and I'm sure you're familiar with them, having just heard them in the rotunda – are going to play now a brief musical interlude, and the details of that interlude are spelled out in your program. The RCA Band is Canada's oldest regular army band, having been formed in Quebec City in 1879. It was subsequently stationed in Montreal and Halifax, and it has seen service in both world wars as well as the Korean War, and it has travelled across Canada and elsewhere, throughout our Canadian and national borders. The band was reconstituted in Edmonton in 1997, and today is under the very capable direction of Captain Patrice Arsenault, CD, who is in the Speaker's gallery.

Mr. Maestro, if you wish, please.

Very tempting to join in there, wasn't it?

We shall await the next step in our procedures.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Mr. Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, and Mrs. Ethell, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

Speech from the Throne

His Honour: Pray be seated.

To the people of Alberta, hon. Premier and hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly, distinguished visitors and guests, it is my privilege to deliver the Speech from the Throne as we celebrate the opening of the Second Session of the 28th Alberta Legislature.

Today we live in the most open, unabashedly confident, and forward-looking province in Canada, an Alberta asserting itself proudly on the world stage.

You told your government to work with determination to build an even stronger, safer, healthier, more innovative and prosperous Alberta. You chose a clear path forward, grounded in our proud western values, that have built the Alberta we know today, where hard work and bold, innovative ideas are rewarded, where we enjoy well-paying jobs and continue to have the lowest taxes in Canada while at the same time supporting our most vulnerable citizens, a place where being a good neighbour still matters, where we work together to build caring communities that are as tolerant and welcoming as our people, and a place where families have confidence that their government will stay true to its word and be there with the education, health care, and infrastructure they need.

Your government has an unwavering belief that while our quality of life is great, it can be even better, and that core principle is the very foundation of the building Alberta plan.

The Building Alberta Plan

Almost two years ago I delivered this government's first Speech from the Throne. It contained the following passage.

Over the next four years this government will . . . deliver and fulfill a clear, focused, target-driven mandate. Albertans will know where the province is headed and how progress is being made because this is a government that will stay true to its promises.

The building Alberta plan is your government's answer to that commitment, the blueprint for action focused clearly on the three priorities you told your government are most important: investing in families and communities, opening new markets for Alberta's resources, and ensuring government lives within its means.

Since 2012 your government has made tremendous progress on all three fronts despite the challenges our province faced from the worst flood in Canadian history and the deep discount Alberta receives for its oil and gas. But neither nature's wrath nor

economic fury stood in the way of your government's plan to build an even better quality of life for Albertans.

Investing in families means your government is making good on its key promise to build 50 new schools and modernize 70 more over the next three years, keeping class sizes low with over 86,000 new spaces for our children.

Your government is already working with communities across Alberta to develop the first wave of family care clinics that are open later and provide health care closer to home. More FCCs will follow.

Just last month new neonatal intensive care beds at the Alberta Children's hospital were opened to help give parents peace of mind and more newborns a healthy start in life.

From the Calgary film studio, the new seniors' care home in Strathmore, and the new training labs in Lethbridge to the new nurse training program in Grande Prairie, the final mile initiative to connect our rural and remote regions, and our partnership on affordable housing with Habitat for Humanity in Edson, the largest rural build in Canada, under the building Alberta plan your government is making the investments today that matter to Albertans.

Last fall your government signed an agreement 50 years in the making to complete Calgary's ring road. This government is three years ahead of schedule in finishing Edmonton's ring road and will twin highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray in full and on time by 2016.

To support these initiatives and investment in the quality services Albertans expect, your government is opening new markets. Key to the building Alberta plan, new markets mean higher royalties, better jobs, and fairer prices for our products.

In November the governments of Alberta and British Columbia signed a landmark agreement to move Alberta's oil and gas to the B.C. coast while protecting Alberta's royalties. The first-ever provincial energy agreement with China was signed last year. To increase agriculture exports, already Alberta's second-largest industry, we signed trade agreements with the states of Meghalaya and Punjab in India this January. Over the last year alone this government's focus on building new markets in Asia resulted in at least \$460 million in new investment and trade for Alberta in addition to major new investments in our province by companies like CNOOC and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

Your government will continue to fight for Alberta's producers and against unfair country of origin labelling rules in the United States while leading the charge for better rail service so our rural farm families can get their grain to international markets. This includes pushing the federal government to impose real penalties for those shippers who fail to meet their grain delivery obligations to our producers.

To meet the commitment under the building Alberta plan to live within its means, your government made difficult decisions in Budget 2013, decisions that helped Alberta turn the corner, putting our province on the path to a balanced budget. Some 375 programs have already been reviewed under results-based budgeting, with the third phase set to begin and be fully completed this year.

Last year MLAs froze their pay for four years, following an 8 per cent MLA pay cut in 2012. Your government negotiated long-term wage agreements with Alberta's hard-working teachers and doctors to ensure stability in learning and care.

Through a new single energy regulator, a new environmental monitoring agency, and a refocused Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission your government has acted on many years of consultation and hard work to make Alberta more competitive. With the commitment to keep royalties steady and partner with our oil and gas industry on innovative solutions to enhance

Alberta's position as a responsible energy producer, your government continues to build our competitive advantage.

And, clearly, the building Alberta plan is working.

The Building Alberta Plan Is Working

Alberta is Canada's economic engine. We led the country in economic growth for the last two years. TD Bank says that we will do so again this year, Statistics Canada shows that we have the highest rate of job creation and the highest family incomes in Canada with the lowest taxes, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that we have the friendliest small-business climate in Canada.

It's no secret why Alberta saw our highest rate of population growth since 1981 last year, when we proudly welcomed over 100,000 new Albertans to our province. Our population will grow from 4 million people today to 5 million in the next decade. That's equivalent to adding a new city the size of Red Deer to our province every year for the next 10 years.

While new Albertans bring skills and innovative new ideas, pressures will continue to mount on our schools, health facilities, roads, and transit systems. The actions we take today under the building Alberta plan will have a direct bearing on life in Alberta 20 years from now. Building nothing would sacrifice Alberta's future. That's clearly not an option. Today marks the beginning of the next phase of the building Alberta plan, focused on meeting Alberta's enormous growth head-on while having the courage to invest in innovation and in future generations to set our province up for long-term success.

The Next Phase: Investing in Families and Communities

Our cities and towns are at the forefront of dealing with Alberta's explosive growth, and we know that Alberta's success depends on all regions of the province, no matter how small, being able to meet that growth head-on.

To keep building communities, your government will complete the review of the Municipal Government Act, working with municipal leaders and partners like Bob Barss, president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and Helen Rice from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, who have joined us today.

Your government recognizes the unique challenges faced by our two largest cities and will finalize the Calgary and Edmonton city charters with Mayor Nenshi and Mayor Iveson, who is also here today.

To help our rural towns and urban communities keep up with growth, your government will renew the long-term funding commitment to the municipal sustainability initiative and GreenTRIP funding in Budget 2014.

Standing with those communities hard hit by last June's floods, this government will make firm the commitment to build community mitigation projects and to undertake new flood hazard mapping throughout the province, starting with southern Alberta watersheds.

The next phase of the building Alberta plan will continue to invest in families. This government will invest in better seniors' care, focusing funding on aging in place and on innovative new technology that allows patients to recover in their own homes. Your government will consider options, including using provincial land, to meet the commitment to build new continuing care beds.

For a healthier and more prosperous Alberta your government will implement Alberta's wellness strategy to lower acute health costs and improve quality of life, working closely with champions

like Jim Gray who have done much to promote the importance of wellness in our province.

To give Alberta's kids the best start in life, your government will invest in additional newborn screening, support for parents, and child mental health, working across government departments to ensure our families receive the help they need.

To ensure Alberta's kids are able to compete in a dynamic, highly competitive world, your government is developing a new, student-centred curriculum that will ensure a strong understanding of basic literacy and numeracy. Your government is replacing provincial achievement tests with new student learner assessments to better identify areas of strength and areas where children may require additional supports throughout the school year.

Your government is committed to building a culture of transparency, quality care, and continuous improvement in Alberta's child intervention system on the foundation of changes made to date and the recent child care round-table. These changes will include extending support for young adults in care by two years, to age 24, to help youth transition more successfully to adulthood.

And your government will challenge Albertans, including businesses, nonprofit organizations, and employers, to provide mentorship opportunities for young people and connect those who are already driving these initiatives to ensure our kids have positive influences to help shape their future.

To better protect families, this government reaffirms its commitment to projects like I-TRAC to bring together police, specialized court officers, and counselling for Albertans facing domestic violence, including immediate protection for victims and punishment for offenders.

Your government will take the long view when it comes to investments in higher education, working on innovative new ways to ensure Albertans have the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to become the entrepreneurs, skilled workers, and researchers we need to thrive. To ensure rural residents have quality education opportunities without having to leave home, your government will work to ensure that distance education is an important part of Campus Alberta.

With the support of industry partners your government will build Canada's first and only dedicated pipeline training facility to train more heavy equipment operators and those who work in pipeline construction and land reclamation. Your government will also work to diversify Alberta's own domestic energy mix and will introduce an alternative and renewable energy framework that empowers consumers to exercise choice within the market-based electricity system.

The Next Phase: Living within Our Means

And while this government will continue to invest in programs, services, and infrastructure to build a better quality of life for Albertans, it reaffirms the commitment under this next phase of the building Alberta plan to live within its means and balance the budget. By expanding the results-based budgeting process and holding spending below population and inflation growth until 2016, your government is keeping its commitment.

The first bill of this session will create new supports, funded from Alberta's growing savings, for research and world-leading innovation to drive growth and economic diversification for decades to come.

The agriculture and food innovation endowment will fund research in rural Alberta and help new made-in-Alberta agricultural solutions get to market.

The social innovation endowment will invest in new research and co-ordinate action between small businesses, cultural organizations, and nonprofits to address social issues, including poverty and family violence.

The Alberta heritage scholarship fund will be expanded to support excellence in the apprenticeship, trade, and technology systems and encourage training to build the skilled workforce Alberta needs.

To further set our future leaders up for success, your government will fund the creation of the Lougheed leadership institute, working with the University of Alberta and the Banff Centre.

And your government will create the Alberta institute for research and commercialization as a clearing house to help solve challenges and turn Alberta's best ideas into tomorrow's solutions.

The Next Phase: Opening New Markets

What makes all of this possible, indeed what your government has deemed job one, is an unrelenting focus on selling Alberta to the world. The next phase of the building Alberta plan continues to build new markets for our products and welcomes the world's investment in Alberta so your government can keep investing in what matters most.

Building on the success of the Premier's Canadian energy strategy, your government will advocate for a Canada free trade zone, seizing the opportunity to have provinces reduce internal trade barriers that often make it more difficult to trade within our own borders than outside.

To increase trade, business, and tourism, this government will support open skies, building on the work being done by both the Calgary and Edmonton airports. This week marks the inaugural Icelandair flight out of Edmonton International, an initiative led by the airport's past president Reg Milley. Alberta's doors are open, and we are ready to welcome the world and tell our story.

To support rural families in communities like Peace River, Slave Lake, and Whitecourt, your government will continue to support innovation in the forestry sector, Alberta's fifth-largest industry, that today employs 13,000 people. By opening new markets for our forestry products, even more jobs will be created.

The government of Alberta will continue to work with the federal government on areas of shared interest, making sure Alberta has the skilled workers it needs while standing up for our province by seeking clarity on foreign direct investment rules and improvements in aboriginal consultation and care.

And no matter where or when it arises, your government will continue to advocate for important projects like Keystone XL, which are so vital to our long-term prosperity, while meeting misunderstanding with fact in promoting our record as a responsible energy producer.

Conclusion

Under the next phase of the building Alberta plan our province will continue to stand as a beacon of opportunity, where we work every day to build a stronger, modern, better province together. Your government will rise above the daily fray and remain squarely focused on what truly matters to Albertans.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. May God bless you all.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: Thank you, Your Honour.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Robert Clark to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*. Please remain standing at the conclusion of the singing.

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen,
long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send her victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us;
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Hon. members and esteemed guests, I beg your indulgence in allowing me to impart some very important information about this wonderful, this beautiful building that we call the Alberta Legislature and you, of course, who are seated here in the Legislative Assembly Chamber. It is with great pleasure that I am able to announce that the restorations of both the minor dome, which sits right above us, and the cupola, that sits above the rotunda outside, have now been completed, and the Legislature Building will be celebrating this fact throughout the month of March. We've been waiting a long time for that to happen. I want to thank and congratulate the Minister of Infrastructure for doing such a great job within two months, a project that took nearly two years, by the way.

The objective of the project, which commenced back in 2012, was to restore both domes so that they were replicas of the original structures, which were completed more than 100 years ago. The project, of course, involved the demolition of the existing terracotta cladding of the cupola and the upgrading of the structure with the installation of a new concrete shell and a waterproof membrane. How do I know this? I know this because the Minister of Infrastructure invited me to climb right to the top of the cupola a few days ago. We made it all the way up and down safely and soundly. Thank you to the wonderful workers who made that possible. The successful completion of this project is a very fitting tribute to this most resplendent of all Alberta landmarks, which just enjoyed its centennial last year.

Allow me also to fill you in briefly with some historical vignettes in this regard. I want to point out that 2014 marks the 75th anniversary of the royal visit to Canada and to Alberta of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. This was the very first visit of a reigning monarch to Alberta and to Canada, for that matter, and as Their Majesties were making their way across Canada by train in May of 1939, preparations were already under way for the royal visit being finalized here, in our own Alberta Legislature. In preparation further for that visit life-sized portraits of King George and Queen Elizabeth were placed in the Chamber, a new green carpet was installed, the Chamber was repainted, and a temporary fountain containing live fish was situated in the rotunda. The permanent fountain was installed in 1959, actually, to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, whose portraits adorn our walls today.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

On June 2, 1939, the king and queen arrived, and Edmonton played host to Their Majesties. Addresses were made by representatives of the province and of the city of Edmonton at the Legislature Building on the front stairs. Seven Albertans who had been awarded the Victoria Cross for outstanding service during the First World War were presented to the king.

The royal couple then entered the Legislature Building, arriving in the Chamber, where two Speaker's chairs to be used as thrones had been placed on the dais right here for Their Majesties. One of the thrones used was that of the Speaker of the day, Mr. Peter Dawson. The other was the chair of former Speaker George N. Johnston, which had been presented to him in appreciation of his services. In the Chamber itself, where you now sit, Members of the Legislative Assembly and city councillors, amongst other dignitaries, were presented to the king and queen, and Their Majesties then signed a register of their royal visit, which has since been stored and preserved in our own Alberta archives. Commemorating the 1939 royal visit were name changes enacted by a city of Edmonton bylaw, changing Riverside park to Queen Elizabeth park and Portage Avenue to Kingsway Avenue.

Now, with respect to a couple of other brief historical notes March, of course, is the month during which the opening of the first Legislature of the new province of Alberta took place. In fact, the first Legislature opened on March 15, 1906, at the well-known Thistle rink, the curling club, which was the only facility in Edmonton, by the way, large enough to host such a prestigious opening. The rink, located in our own downtown area, had a capacity of 3,000 seats, and every single seat was filled for that occasion. Subsequent sittings of the Assembly took place in the McKay Avenue school, at the top of the 105th Street hill, just a few blocks from here. This particular building, the Legislature, where you sit, was then opened in the fall of 1912.

My final note is just to inform you that March 3 is the sixth anniversary of the provincial general election of March 3, 2008. I want to congratulate all the members who were elected for the first time or who were re-elected on March 3, 2008, and I would like all of them to please rise now and receive our thanks, everyone who was elected or re-elected. Thank you, all, and congratulations once again.

Tablings

The Speaker: I have the honour now to table a copy of the speech that was graciously given by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Bill 1 Savings Management Act

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 1, the Savings Management Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed act puts into action a new vision for Alberta's savings as we launch the next phase of the building Alberta plan. It strikes a balance between saving for the future and putting our growing heritage fund savings to work for that future by funding innovation and diversifying our economy for the

benefit of generations to come. Bill 1 creates new innovation endowments, it enhances the Alberta heritage scholarship fund, and it establishes the Alberta future fund. The endowments will help to provide ongoing funding for social, cultural, and agricultural innovation as well as trade scholarships. It will foster research. It will strengthen our economy, help solve complex social problems, and position Alberta to take full advantage of our incredible know-how and research brilliance.

The agriculture and food innovation endowment will fund research in rural Alberta to build ongoing diversification and competitiveness and position Alberta's agriculture and food processing sectors for sustained growth in new and expanded markets. The social innovation endowment will increase the capacity of the social service and cultural sector to innovate and to find solutions by supporting new ideas and encouraging creative collaboration. The Alberta heritage scholarship fund will be expanded to support excellence in the apprenticeship, trades, and technology sectors and will help us build the skilled workforce that Alberta needs. Finally, the Alberta future fund will provide government with a source of funding so that we can take full advantage of future opportunities. Together these commitments will help to encourage innovation, grow our economy, and solve complex social problems while still allowing for our savings to grow by approximately \$2.8 billion over the next three years.

This bill complements the great work that is currently under way and better prepares all Albertans to thrive and to build Alberta's communities, our economy, and our quality of life. This bill will help our entrepreneurs, tradespeople, small-business owners, innovators, social workers, and community organizations

to turn today's ideas into tomorrow's solutions. In the same way that Progressive Conservative governments have taken the long view and built Alberta into the economic powerhouse that we are today, Bill 1 will put in place today concrete measures to ensure that we have the skills and the leading-edge ideas that we need to secure a better tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, this bill keeps the commitment that we made to the people of Alberta to build a stronger, more innovative and prosperous Alberta, and I'm proud to have the opportunity to introduce it today.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the speech of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration on Tuesday, March 4, 2014.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:52 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 4, 2014

Issue 2

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. On this day I would ask all members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly as well as all others present here and those who are situated elsewhere and may be observing or listening to these proceedings to join with us together in a minute of silence and personal prayer as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian police officers and military personnel lost in service to their country, to their province, or their community. In a moment of silence let us remember them all. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful for their service. God bless them and their families. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to the members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome members of the Abdurahman family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. I will ask each of them to rise as I call their names, and then perhaps we could recognize them all together once all have risen: Dr. Abdul Abdurahman, husband, from Edmonton; Miss Amanda Burnett, daughter, from Beaumont; Ross Abdurahman, son, from Edmonton; Vanessa Krysta, daughter, from Sherwood Park; Dean Krysta, son-in-law, from Sherwood Park; Dara Ann Irvine, granddaughter, from Edmonton; Christina Girringer, granddaughter, from Fort Saskatchewan; and Alexandra Irvine, granddaughter, from Edmonton.

Please know that our thoughts and prayers are with all of you, and thank you very, very much for coming today.

Mrs. Muriel Ross Abdurahman April 29, 1938, to December 22, 2013

The Speaker: Now I would ask all members to please rise as I deliver a tribute for Muriel Ross Abdurahman, who passed away on December 22, 2013. Mrs. Muriel Abdurahman served this Legislative Assembly of Alberta as the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan from June 15, 1993, until March 10, 1997. Trained as a nurse in her native Scotland, her commitment to community well-being led her to enter public service. Once settled in Fort Saskatchewan with her family, she was elected to town council for one term. She subsequently served as mayor for two terms and oversaw Fort Saskatchewan's incorporation as a city.

She then turned her attention to this Assembly, where she served for four years. Her intellect and experience made her a knowledgeable voice in this Legislature and elsewhere on issues such as finance, health, the environment, transportation, municipal affairs, and most of all she knitted it all together with one word, integrity. She emblazoned that phrase on all of us who had the pleasure of working with her.

In a moment of silent prayer, hon. members, I ask you to remember Mrs. Muriel Abdurahman as you may have known her. Rest eternal grant unto her, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon her. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with some school groups. The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of grade 9 junior high students from l'école Broxton Park school in Spruce Grove. These students did not have an opportunity to attend the Legislature when they were in grade 6, so it's kind of nice to see them here. As they're taking the federal government, they're comparing the differences between the federal government and the provincial government, and of course I helped them along with the differences on that one in the rotunda. They are accompanied by Ms Fran Korpela, their teacher. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 55 students from H.E. Bourgoin school and the Iron River school in my beautiful constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. A warm welcome to some former colleagues of mine and to all the parents that accompanied these fabulous students here to Edmonton. They are seated in both galleries, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 51 students from Our Lady of the Prairies school in Edmonton-McClung and their teachers and parents Mr. Bill Swan, Mme Lisa Mercurio, Raphael Fortin, Gabrielle Liles, Miss Karla MacLennan, and Mrs. Darcia Westling. I ask the students and their chaperones to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you 30 members and parents from St. Angela elementary school. We have parent helpers Mrs. Theberge, Mrs. Davies, Mr. Skreden, and Mr. Henrik Larsen along with teachers Mrs. Perry and Mrs. Schoenberger. The class is also here for the whole week, so they're learning a lot about the Legislature. I'd ask them to stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

If not, let's move on with other guests, starting with the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

1:40

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you on behalf of our colleague the hon. Minister of Education representatives from the town of Gibbons. I know that the hon. minister is really honoured to work with these outstanding constituents. He looks forward to meeting with them a little later today and discussing local issues and thanking them for the good work that they're doing on behalf of the community of Gibbons every day. I'd like to ask these individuals to please rise as I say their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. I'm introducing that

Doug Horner, not this Doug Horner. This is Doug Horner, the mayor of Gibbons; Councillor Louise Bauder; Councillor Amber Harris; and Councillor Darren McCann.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Marilyn Koren. She's an advocate for protecting children. Marilyn's granddaughter, Delonna Sullivan, was taken away by child services without an apprehension order and, tragically, died six days later. Marilyn and her daughter Jamie were successful in having a publication ban lifted through the Court of Queen's Bench. Marilyn is here to be a voice for Delonna and for every other child in our province and encourages us all to make our children our priority. I would like to ask Marilyn to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my constituents, Mr. Gordon Francis. Gordon is president and CEO of MD DataBank, an Alberta-based health care IT company that specializes in data assurance services for physicians and other custodians of health information. Gordon's experience spans more than 25 years and includes technology development in the aerospace, energy, and mining sectors. Gordon has spent the last 10 years in the health sector. Gordon is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly three wonderful ladies: Olesia Luciw-Andryjowycz, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; Daria Luciw, past president of the UCC; and Slavka Shulakewych, provincial co-ordinator of UCC. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 20 new employees in the Department of Service Alberta. They're led by Tyler Jameson, the human resource services co-ordinator, and they're touring the Legislature as part of their orientation. Now, we know that we have incredible people working in every single department of this government, and Service Alberta is no different. I know these 20 individuals will be welcome additions to an already strong team in Service Alberta. I know they're spread between both galleries. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Lori Sigurdson. Lori is the manager of professional affairs at the Alberta College of Social Workers, where she works on behalf of all provincial social workers to influence and improve government action on issues like child poverty, family violence, and homelessness. This evening Lori will be taking her commitment to these values to the next level when she also becomes the first candidate of any party to be officially nominated to run in the next provincial election. We look forward to having her join us here in the Legislature as the next NDP MLA for Edmonton-Riverview. I would now ask Lori to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if my group has an MLA in it somewhere as well. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a group of 25 citizens from the town of Slave Lake. The guests are here today to send a strong message to this PC government that the crisis in health care in their community is very real and very unacceptable. I'll be tabling a petition with almost 3,000 signatures later today. If I could ask my guests to rise as I call their names and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly: Scott Astle, Dion Villeneuve, Kristylynn Barton, Alma Conrad, Alenen Beaudet, Pat Kanzig, Mary Hulberg, Roberta Kozar, Kathy Klassen, Rita Hogan, Marilyn LaRivee, Maureen Mariampillai, Judy Nelson, and Sandra Azocar. If you could rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Events in Ukraine

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address the current situation in Ukraine, a situation that has had a major impact around the world, including here in Alberta and particularly amongst our Ukrainian community of the entire province. The recent violence and the events over the weekend deeply sadden and concern us all. Our thoughts are with the people of Ukraine at this time. This uncertainty and the potential for conflict are quite scary indeed. To the extended families and loved ones of those who have been killed over the last few months, our hearts go out to you. We can all relate to the basic need to feel safe in our homes, our cities, our communities, and our country, to live in communities that uphold and support the rights to freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan with Ukrainian ancestry yourself I have no doubt that these recent developments have resonated with you. Alberta is home to more than a quarter of a million Albertans of Ukrainian descent and a strong and vibrant Ukrainian community. I recognize that all Ukrainian Albertans have been affected by these events; in fact, all Albertans have, whether through their strong cultural ties or through relatives and friends who are experiencing this crisis first-hand. Many Albertans have friends and family living in Ukraine, and we have heard so many scary stories in the past few months. I can only imagine their worry that at any given moment the ones that they love could lose their homes, could face violence, and could lose their lives.

As the situation in Ukraine escalates, the government of Alberta will continue to strongly support the government of Canada and

the Ukrainian people in opposing all efforts to undermine democracy and freedom in Ukraine. Alberta also supports international condemnation of the military intervention in Ukraine over the weekend as well as the government of Canada's diplomatic efforts and proposed economic sanctions, the preferred method of assisting Ukraine. Alberta will continue to stand united with the government of Canada in support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is my hope that through diplomacy and collaboration stability can be restored to Ukraine.

Yesterday the ministers of Culture and International and Intergovernmental Relations joined me in a meeting with the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations to discuss the ongoing situation. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is chair of this council, Mr. Speaker, and will continue to lead the council's efforts to represent Alberta's Ukrainian community, as you have done in the past. This will also give us the opportunity to identify and strengthen and further the co-operation between the governments of Ukraine and Alberta. The government of Alberta has also been working to develop an aid package for Ukraine. This will include up to \$100,000 in matching funding to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine through Alberta Culture's international development program with a foundation grant of \$25,000.

Here in Alberta we will continue to monitor the situation in Ukraine alongside the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations, as every other citizen of this province will. Mr. Speaker, it is events like this that remind us of how privileged we are to live where it is safe, in a democratic country like Canada. We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and we are hopeful that a peaceful resolution will be found soon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in solidarity with Ukrainian Albertans and all freedom-loving Ukrainians around the world. Our thoughts are with all of those, especially those who have lost their lives, who have fought so hard for peace, liberty, and democracy. It is our sincere hope that Russia will choose to withdraw their troops from the Crimean peninsula. Samantha Power, the American ambassador to the United Nations, expressed the view of the global community perfectly when she said this: "Russia has every right to wish that events . . . had turned out differently, but it does not have the right to express that . . . using military force."

1:50

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, it is not Russia that is the problem; it is their leadership. Vladimir Putin has said that he had to intervene in Ukraine to protect ethnic Russians and the Russian language. The fact is that almost every Ukrainian speaks Russian. The vast majority of their television channels, magazines, and books are in the Russian language. There continues to be no evidence of any threats to Russian citizens or ethnic Russians in the Crimean peninsula despite Russia's insistence. Again, to quote Ms Power: "Russian mobilization is a response to an imaginary threat." We've seen this all before. Russia continues to occupy vast sections of the republics of Georgia and Moldova.

As the Official Opposition we support our federal government's call on the Russian President to respect the will of the Ukrainian people, who have made it clear that they will not tolerate corruption and want their country to be a free and prosperous democracy. Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird recently wrote to

the Ukrainian people: "Canada has never been indifferent. Canada will never be indifferent. Our country will continue to stand with you in your time of difficulty, and we will walk with you step-by-step in your journey to democracy." We in the Wildrose Official Opposition couldn't agree more.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I invite all Albertans to the March 12 fundraiser for humanitarian aid to Ukraine at St. John's Cultural Centre in Edmonton. Canada is home to the world's largest Ukrainian community outside of Ukraine and Russia. It is our duty to stand with them during this time of crisis.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I assume you're rising to seek consent to participate?

Ms Blakeman: Indeed I am, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping for the co-operation of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to allow the leaders of the Liberal opposition and the ND opposition to add their remarks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a request has been received to allow participation by the leader of the Liberal opposition and the leader of the ND opposition, and by extension it goes out to you, independent member, as well, should you wish to participate.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, fellow members of the Assembly. The Alberta Liberals stand united with the Premier and the leaders of the opposition parties and each and every member of this Assembly in condemning the violence that's happening in Ukraine. Violence and terror are absolutely unacceptable in a peaceful world, where children and families are being punished for fighting for democracy and freedoms. As a democratic nation this is what our forefathers have struggled to protect, a safe world for our families and our children. We as a human race, as a global community, must stand with those who are suffering as they fight for the democracies that we fight to protect.

Mr. Speaker, the members of the Ukrainian community have helped transform not only this province or this country but, in fact, even this Legislature. You yourself – your family and your ancestors are from the Ukraine – and many members of this Assembly, a former Premier, former Liberal leader Laurence Decore helped transform this country, making sure that this was a multicultural and multilingual country. Members of the Ukrainian community in Alberta have been leaders in economics, academics, research, and all walks of life.

I stand alongside every member of this Assembly in solidarity, in fighting for protection of their family members back home. Mr. Speaker, I believe that if we as human beings focus on peace, love, and our shared humanity, we can make this a better world.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to stand up for our fellow human beings and brothers and sisters across the world. May God bless Ukraine. May God bless Alberta. May God bless Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by thanking the Premier for raising this important issue in the Legislature and by expressing our support for the government's decision to match donations for humanitarian aid to help those who have been affected by the recent violence in Ukraine. Alberta's New Democrats believe that everyone has a right to safety, security, and democracy. The Alberta NDP calls for the

immediate withdrawal of foreign troops in Ukraine and an end to all foreign interference in Ukraine's internal affairs. Ukrainians must have the right to determine their own future peacefully and democratically. On behalf of the Alberta New Democrats I wish to express my concern for people of Ukrainian descent in Alberta who have family in Ukraine. Our hope is that they will remain safe and well. Finally, I extend the hopes of all Alberta New Democrats for a very bright and prosperous future for the Ukrainian people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo? Not at this time. Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us begin the process in just a moment. I want to indicate a couple of brief comments that affect the rotation. Before we proceed with the actual daily Routine and question period, I want to make this brief statement about that rotation and members' statements as well. This statement that I'm about to offer is further to the memo I sent to each of you on February 11, and included there were some attachments that pertained to projected sitting days and to the Oral Question Period rotation for this Second Session. There was a slight change required because of the change in caucus membership when the Member for Edmonton-Manning rejoined the government caucus in December of 2013.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, who is the sole independent member, receives question 6 on day 4 of the Oral Question Period rotation. Accordingly, the member will have his first opportunity to ask a question next Monday, March 10, 2014. This will give that member one question every four days, which replicates what happened in the fall sitting of 2013, when each independent member received one question per sitting week. Furthermore, it mirrors what happened the last time there was only one independent member in this Assembly, during the fall sitting of the Fourth Session of the 27th Legislature, when the independent member at that time was given one question every four days.

Question 6 on day 1, which was asked by an independent member during the last sitting, will now revert to the Official Opposition. The PC caucus will receive one additional spot for one question on day 1.

Now, with respect to the rotation for members' statements, this has also been modified to provide for one statement for the independent member every three weeks. This is reflected on the projected sitting days calendar that I sent to you under the same aforementioned memo of February 11.

Bearing that in mind, let us proceed onward. We can start the clock.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First question.

Premier's Travel to South Africa

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no sense beating around the bush here. I'll be blunt and short. There's one question that Albertans are asking the Premier, and I hear it everywhere I go. I'm sure all 87 of us are hearing the same thing, so here it is.

Will the Premier reimburse taxpayers for her \$45,000 South Africa trip? Yes or no?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. This has certainly been an issue that has been in the news, and it's one of the reasons that I went out to Albertans and said that I was concerned about what that final number was. It's why I apologized to Albertans. I took responsibility for that.

You know, this was a trip where the Prime Minister of Canada asked me to attend as part of government business, a Canadian delegation. I did participate in that trip. I did come back for a cabinet swearing-in. Mr. Speaker, I take full responsibility. We have taken steps to ensure that these sorts of situations don't happen again, and that's what I've said to Albertans.

Ms Smith: The problem is, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier of Nova Scotia went for \$1,000.

This government continues to claim that they are living within their means, but when the Premier herself spends more on a single trip than thousands of hard-working Albertans earn in a single year, it is impossible to take those claims seriously. The Premier's credibility is in tatters and with it the credibility of the government on fiscal issues. Again to the Premier: doesn't she see that her actions and her words simply don't line up?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in fact, that is the reason that when this issue first came up, I did go out and speak to Albertans. I was very forthright with Albertans. There is no doubt that this is a number that troubles me as well. It was certainly part of the work that I did as the Premier of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do the work that Albertans have asked us to do. We had a throne speech yesterday and have a budget on Thursday that will demonstrate clearly to Albertans that the fiscal framework that is in place in this province is going to allow for continued success. That is the work that this government will continue to do.

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's not leadership, and Albertans deserve better.

In criticizing the Premier's South Africa trip expenses, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview gave voice to thousands of frustrated Albertans when he said that they were inconsistent with Alberta values. He was right. Albertans don't abuse their privileges; Albertans don't take what doesn't belong to them; and when Albertans screw up, they admit it, they fix it, and they do it without being told. Again to the Premier: why does she continue to be so offside with the values of everyday hard-working Albertans?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, you know, as I said, I thank the hon. member for the question. I clearly stood up in front of Albertans, said that I screwed up, and did take responsibility. I certainly hope that that is something that Albertans understand. I will say that I have had many Albertans ask me that question as well. I've been forthright with respect to that. We've certainly taken steps with respect to moving forward to ensure that we continue to be accountable to Albertans. We have an expense policy in place and complete transparency with respect to these costs, which is one of the reasons that we are able today to talk about this issue. We were honest, we were straightforward, and I took responsibility.

The Speaker: Thank you.

On the second main question, the hon. opposition leader.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, taking responsibility means paying the money back.

The government has a travel, meal, and hospitality expense policy that the Premier should probably get familiar with. It spells out in pretty clear terms what kinds of expenses are legitimate to claim on behalf of taxpayers and what kinds aren't. The Premier's South Africa trip clearly doesn't make the grade. So let me ask the Premier a simple question. When did the Treasury Board give the Premier and her staff a blanket exemption from the government's own travel policy?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I went to South Africa because the Prime Minister of Canada asked me to go. That, in my mind, is government business. There are many different functions that many of us in this House, whether we're members or members of the government, undertake as a result of our responsibilities and our duties. Certainly this was one of those. It was a very tight time frame. You'll know that we do have policies and procedures in place with respect to this. We continue to abide by those. It's why I spoke to Albertans about this, and it's why I apologized to them.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the policy states that if an official travels at a cost, that has to be "direct, practical or cost-effective." That's what the policy says. They're only entitled to reimbursement on that amount. Anything over and above that is the sole and personal responsibility of the individual. In the example of the Premier's South Africa trip she could have travelled to Ottawa for a few thousand dollars. Instead, she spent \$45,000, a difference of \$40,000. To the Premier: why did she violate her government's own travel policy?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as Albertans know, all of these events happened in a very short period of time. [interjection] Well, it was a short period of time. There is certainly a policy that we have in place in our office with respect to estimating costs of missions before we attend those missions. Because of the timeliness of this, it was very difficult to do that. As I said to Albertans, I was surprised by that number. That was something that I was disappointed in, and it's why I stood up and took responsibility for that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the policy goes on to state: "taxpayer dollars are to be used prudently and responsibly." Obviously the South Africa trip expenses were nothing of the sort. We've heard the Premier several times now claim responsibility and say sorry, but she continues to do nothing to demonstrate her remorse. Again to the Premier: doesn't she realize that her stubborn refusal to repay this bill is the ultimate contempt for taxpayers?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as soon as these numbers were brought to my attention, I went out and said to Albertans that I was disappointed by the numbers. I said that I took responsibility. I apologized to Albertans. We will ensure that that never happens again. We've taken steps with respect to requesting the Auditor General to review out-of-province travel on government claims, and we've also taken steps to ask the President of Treasury Board to review our expense policy in the context of RFPs for accommodation, for travel. These are steps that Albertans can have confidence in.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, you and I are parents, as is the Premier, and I think we've all had the opportunity with our children to teach them that when you take something that doesn't belong to you, you give it back after you say sorry. Premier, you took at least \$45,000 that did not belong to you, and you spent it on a trip that should have cost you about a thousand dollars. You

did so not for the benefit of Albertans; you did so to pamper yourself. Will you do the right and honourable thing and pay back the money?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, every single day we make decisions in this House that honour the trust that Albertans have put in us as a government. There is no doubt that that was a time when it was very difficult and very quick to make the decision to attend that trip. You'll know that on the Friday we changed cabinet. On the next Friday we were going to swear in cabinet. There were a number of logistics that were involved in that trip. But aside from all that I said to Albertans that I did take responsibility, that I was sorry. We have put steps in place to ensure that this does not happen again, and we'll abide by those.

Mr. Anderson: Taking responsibility means paying back the money, Mr. Speaker.

You may remember the infamous no-meet committee prior to the last election. Only after public outrage did the Premier finally order her caucus members to pay back the money they had received. So, Premier, some might say that you're practising a double standard here, ordering your caucus to pay back money that didn't really belong to them but refusing to pay back your own \$45,000 flight of fancy. Premier, why will you not take responsibility, not only say you're sorry but pay back the money?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the House that this was a Canadian delegation to a state funeral for someone who mattered to the world, and that was business that I undertook on behalf of Albertans as the Premier of this province. I do not disagree with the opposition, with my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, and with some people in Alberta who have said to me that that was a very high number for two people to travel to South Africa. I don't disagree with that. I've acknowledged that. I've taken responsibility for it. We've put steps in place to review those policies, and we'll stand by those.

Mr. Anderson: You can't take something that's not yours and then apologize and then not give it back. That's not how the world works, Premier. You're embarrassing yourself, and you're embarrassing your caucus with this and rightfully so.

Albertans are saying that if you can't competently manage a million dollar travel budget, how can we have any faith in you to manage a multibillion dollar Education or Health budget? How can we? Premier, don't blame the Wildrose or the media or your staff for the problems here. Will you do the right thing and pay back the money?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have clearly said that this was an unfortunate circumstance. I personally wish that it hadn't happened. It did, and we will now move on and continue to do what Albertans did. If the hon. member has any doubt about whether or not this government can manage the economy and the budget of this province, just wait until tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only person who looks good in the Travelgate affair is the Premier of Nova Scotia, a fiscally responsible Liberal, who managed to get to South Africa and back for less than a thousand dollars. Everyone knows that this Premier, on the other hand, who claims her government is committed to living within its means, billed Albertans \$45,000 for essentially the same trip. To the Premier. You've apologized.

You've acknowledged you made a mistake. But Albertans don't want your words, Premier. Just pay the money back. They expect action. Will you please pay the money back?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I cannot disagree with what the hon. member has said with respect to the fact that this was a large amount of money. That is why, as soon as I realized how much it was, I said to Albertans that I agreed with that comment. I took responsibility for this. Even though it was the business of the government of Alberta and I travelled as Premier on a Canadian delegation, it was more money than we expected it to be. There were some circumstances related to that, and I certainly take full responsibility. I have apologized to Albertans, and I hope that Albertans will accept that apology.

2:10

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, nobody disputes that the Premier and any MLA have reasonable duties they must perform. There is an old saying that when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. The Premier seems to have forgotten that when a similar expense scandal erupted, she forced members of her own caucus to take up a collection to reimburse taxpayers for the no-pay committee fiasco. To the Premier: when it comes to returning wasted taxpayer dollars, why is there one standard of rules for your caucus members and another standard of rules for you? Why, Premier?

Ms Redford: Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member wants to draw a comparison between these two circumstances, but they were actually entirely different circumstances. I travelled to South Africa, I attended a state funeral as the Premier of this province at the request of the Prime Minister, and I returned. As I have said, while this was an unfortunate amount of money, which I fully acknowledge and I've taken responsibility for, I don't think anyone will dispute that I actually went on the trip.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is right. These are different circumstances. The MLAs were forced to be on the committee; the Premier had an option to take a cheaper flight. This government is ruthless when it comes to clawing back money from AISH recipients, the assured income for the severely handicapped, and single mothers on welfare. It even goes as far as sending collection agencies after them. Yet there seems to be no end to the government's sense of entitlement or the amount of money it will spend to make itself comfortable. To the Premier: why the double standard?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we run a \$40 billion corporation that matters an awful lot to the people of Alberta and to the economy of this country. I remember at the last election listening to Albertans talk about the fact that they were proud that Alberta had a role on the Canadian stage and the international stage. It's one of the reasons that we continue to do the work that we do, and there is no doubt that there are expenses associated with that. I have clearly said that this amount of money was not an acceptable amount. I've apologized to Albertans, and I believe that as we do that, we should be able to move forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, leader of the ND opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is the best of times; it is the worst of times. In this PC government's tale of two

Albertas the Premier jets around the world in first class while Alberta families must make do with less. Legislated wage freezes, pension rollbacks, and cuts to programs for vulnerable Albertans are the thin gruel offered by this PC government to Alberta families. Why does the Premier expect Alberta families to make sacrifice after sacrifice while she and her friends live high on the hog at the taxpayers' expense?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the hon. member understands the work that we all do as members of this Legislature, the work that we do as elected politicians, the work that we do as cabinet ministers, and the work that I do as Premier. There is no doubt that as we do that work, there are expenses associated with that. One of the things that has been troubling to me, and I said it to Albertans – I've written today to the Auditor General on this, and I'm quite happy to table that letter – is that we must take a look at how those expenses are costed and what they are. It's why I went out and said to Albertans that I took responsibility, and I apologized for something that I wish hadn't happened.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The one thing I don't understand is the Premier's double standard. Why won't this Premier recognize that her exorbitant use of public funds for travel, excessive security, use of government aircraft, and staff severances is an unfair and unjust contrast to frozen wages and reduced pensions for public employees in our province?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to ask me questions with respect to this circumstance, that's fine, but it is entirely inappropriate for this hon. member to mislead the House with respect to AUPE negotiations or pension reform. It is not appropriate to suggest for any reason that the great work that our Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has done with respect to pension reform will not be helpful to public servants in the future. Let's remember that as we saw last week, our better offer to AUPE involved wage increases for four years.

The Speaker: Point of order from Edmonton-Strathcona has been noted at 2:16.

Final supplemental, hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, zero plus zero plus zero doesn't add up to an increase every year.

The vast majority of Albertans do not have private aircraft to pick them up in Palm Springs. If they do have to go to an important event such as a funeral, they drive or they use a commercial flight. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's the tale of two Albertas. To the Premier: won't she abandon her lavish ways and stop her attacks on Alberta families' incomes and their pensions?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, you know, I don't expect a lot from the hon. member, but I think he could at least read the newspaper. The offer that we put on the table to AUPE was increases over four years; not a zero in the deal. So if we're going to talk about apples, let's compare apples to apples, not apples and oranges.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We're going to move on to the sixth main question, so no preambles from this point on, please.

Mathematics Curriculum

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, parents, teachers, and students across this province are very concerned with the radical new curriculum rewrite by Alberta Education. You see, the government and its educators believe in inquiry-based/discovery learning, but to forget about the fundamentals and to abandon tried, tested, and true methods that our kids have been using like times tables is ridiculous, and it does not serve our kids well. Will the Minister of Education do the right thing and ensure, not provide an option but ensure, that the fundamentals of mathematics like times tables are taught in our schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: I will.

Mr. McAllister: Wonderful, Mr. Speaker. Happy to hear it.

How will he do it, when will he do it, and will he make sure that each and every school is teaching times tables?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, those skills that he's talking about are required in the Alberta curriculum today, but exactly how a teacher teaches them from one classroom to the next is a little bit different. Obviously, I expect my kid to know the times tables, and I expect every kid in the province to. One of the things we're doing with the review of the curriculum is that we want to make sure that the basics of literacy and numeracy are becoming more emphasized and are foundational across all subject areas, not just in math and language arts. I'd be happy to talk to the member about that. He obviously has done no research on it, and he has not inquired with me, and he hasn't shown up at any of the sessions.

Mr. McAllister: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are more than 7,000 Albertans that have signed a petition disagreeing with what this minister has to say today, so I would say that given that there are 7,000-plus Albertans who would like to see the fundamentals taught in our education system, will the minister agree to meet with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies, who has spent the time to put this together to stand up for our kids while he and the bureaucrats believe in edubabble and double-talk as opposed to representing Alberta's students?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we have in fact met with the individual. I have looked at the petition. You know, I'm really heartened by the fact that a parent is engaged and has done that great work, and 7,000 names on there – as a matter of fact, they're not all from Alberta. Many are from outside our jurisdiction. But if there's even one parent that's concerned about that, we'll take that into account. We've had her meet with very senior people, including my chief of staff, my deputy minister, and the people working on curriculum, and although we do those revisions on an ongoing basis, we're going to take into account what she's brought forward and what other parents are telling us, including research from around the world and best practices. We're going to make sure that this is the best jurisdiction in the world for our kids to go to school.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday our Premier introduced Bill 1, the Savings Management Act, legislation that will see the creation of two new endowments and enhancements to the Alberta heritage scholarship fund. My question is to the

Minister of Finance. Is this really important for Albertans at this time?

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, please.

The Speaker: Point of order has been noted there.

Hon. Minister of Finance, I'm going to allow you to briefly comment on this and explain to the member where this actually fits in the Routine.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, when we went out around the province last year doing our budget consultations, what we heard from Albertans was: yes, you put legislation into the House last year to legislate savings, but it's important that Albertans understand how those savings are working for them. And that's essentially what Bill 1 is. Hopefully, when we debate it in this House, it will be passed.

2:20

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I'll invite you to ask a supplementary question that doesn't run the risk of being fouled, of being in anticipation.

Mr. Dorward: To the same minister: given that last year you introduced the Fiscal Management Act, acting on a commitment this government made to save in good and challenging times also, how does more spending on endowments and funds fit into that body of work? [interjections]

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a good question because that is a question that comes up in round-tables that we have around the province and open houses that we have in many of their constituencies where Albertans have said: we want you to save, but we also want to know what you're doing with the savings. And that is a critical point of where we're going next. The future of this province means that we have to leverage what we have in the bank, and that means we're going to be using the earnings from those savings for what we're going to be doing in the future.

Mr. Dorward: Again to the same minister: you have said that borrowing for capital purposes is good for Alberta taxpayers because of low rates, but with this legislation it seems like you've opened the government purse strings and you're spending our savings. [interjections]

The Speaker: Why don't we just move on past this? I'll make a comment later with respect to what anticipation is so that everybody understands it more clearly, and I'll take the fault for not having explained it more thoroughly earlier.

Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Stony Plain.

Health Services in Slave Lake

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's Speech from the Throne indicated that the government was working with communities across Alberta to develop family care clinics, yet we have people in the gallery representing their community because this government was not working with them on the already established FCCs. The pilot project Slave Lake FCC was created two years ago, and this past fall four physicians abruptly resigned. Now a community is left with fewer physicians per capita than the country of Nigeria. What is the minister going to do about Slave Lake's grave concerns about the deteriorating access to health care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted that the hon. member refers to the family care clinic in Slave Lake. It wasn't that long ago, following a fire in that community, that the community was down to one doctor. With the introduction of the family care clinic model and the attraction that that brought to physicians and other health professionals, the number of doctors was raised from one to nine. Since then we've seen tremendous progress in Slave Lake in the addition of nurse practitioners, other health care professionals working in the family care clinic, working with local physicians, and working in the emergency department of the hospital. This is a model that is working. It is true that there is a dispute involving physicians at the moment, but the issue is not the model.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about that model that is working. Given that Slave Lake has lost its obstetrics, its trauma service, the local air ambulance, and now half of the doctors, how can the 11,000 residents be confident that they can get the care they need when they need it?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you today that there are six physicians practising in Slave Lake. There are a number of other physicians that have site visits scheduled to the community. This is a community that has been served well by the family care clinic model. It is true that there are four physicians that chose to resign their positions in Slave Lake, as I understand it, in order to pursue private practice in the community. That is certainly their right as private contractors. But the fact remains that this is a vibrant community with a successful model that is attracting more doctors.

Mrs. Forsyth: So, Mr. Speaker, let's continue talking about that successful model. Given that first-time expectant mothers and those with high-risk pregnancies cannot give birth in their home communities because of the lack of doctors, anesthesiologists, and obstetrics support and given that Slave Lake's birth rate is substantially higher than the provincial average, does the minister really expect a mom in labour to drive two and a half hours to a hospital in Edmonton? Frankly, Minister, if it would have been me, I would have never made it.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member is actually interested in supporting the citizens of Slave Lake and recruiting doctors to their community, I suggest she might want to try a different tack. The fact is that one of the four physicians in the community that resigned to pursue private practice had the obstetrical qualifications that the hon. member refers to. At least one of the physicians that will be making site visits to Slave Lake has those qualifications. If this member is interested in supporting that community, she might want to change her recruitment message.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Electricity Market Investigation

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I represent the constituency of Stony Plain. There are several electricity generation facilities in my constituency. A lot of people in my community pay attention to electricity, and they are paying attention to what is going on with TransAlta and the Market Surveillance Administrator. My question is to the new Associate

Minister – Electricity and Renewable Energy. What the heck is going on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you for my first question in this House. This is a really serious matter and one that we're all paying a lot of attention to, so I'm grateful for the question. Briefly, here is what's been happening. The Market Surveillance Administrator, our electricity watchdog, investigated TransAlta for what they're calling anticompetitive behaviour. The MSA has also filed notice with the Alberta Utilities Commission about these allegations. The parties named in the investigation have also filed complaints about the MSA's conduct. Mr. Speaker, this is evidence that the system is working, and it is exactly what should be happening when complaints and allegations arise.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all this finger pointing back and forth, how is the AUC going to proceed?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Unlike some others here in the House, we are not going to jump to conclusions. The AUC is gathering its facts right now to determine how to proceed with the issues. On your question about their capacity the AUC has the experience and the expertise to review these complaints. They have engineers. They have electricity experts. They have lawyers. They have economists. They have people equipped to dig deep on these issues. Mr. Speaker, I have confidence in the AUC's ability to consider and adjudicate these questions.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the AUC finds that the market manipulation was happening, how is that going to help consumers who have overpaid for electricity?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I'll say it again. We cannot prejudice the outcome of this AUC decision. If market manipulation did happen, the government has given AUC the authority to levy a penalty of up to a million dollars a day. As well, they can claw back any economic benefits the AUC determines resulted from that behaviour. Protecting electricity consumers is a priority of this government, which is exactly why we have the regulator and the watchdog in place. If the AUC levies a fine, this government will ensure that those funds are directed to consumers.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Well, TransAlta Corporation was criticized last week for its alleged manipulation of the electricity market, but they cite documents that show this government may have the most serious explaining to do. It's troubling that in recent years the Market Surveillance Administrator, which is supposed to protect Alberta electricity consumers, appears to have adopted a regulatory approach whereby economic withholding, which is just price gouging, is not only permitted but perhaps encouraged. To the associate minister of electricity: was the MSA acting on government instructions when it adopted the new Wild West approach to market surveillance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you for my second question in the House today. The MSA is an independent body that was created when this government chose to deregulate electricity. It was

created for the express purpose of what it's doing today. And if you look at the qualifications of the individual who is acting in that capacity today, you'll be nothing but impressed.

Mr. Hehr: When the MSA was operating under its own policies and procedures, which clearly said that economic withholding is a good thing for these companies to do, why didn't the government step in and say that it is ridiculous to allow corporations to be gouging Albertans on their power bills?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: If the government of Alberta interfered every time there was an allegation about corporate activity, we would be awfully busy.

We have created a system of oversight of the electricity system, including protection of consumers, that is predicated upon the independence of the watchdog and the Alberta Utilities Commission, and we respect those roles and those commissions.

2:30

Mr. Hehr: Given that the Market Surveillance Administrator clearly published two reports that said, and I quote, that private corporations were allowed to engage in economic withholding, end quote, why was the minister and her department not aware, and why didn't they end this practice when that amounts to price gouging?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I believe that this hon. member might be jumping to conclusions. I would rather that these questions be reviewed by experts in the place where we've determined for that adjudication to occur. Concluding that there has been wrongdoing here is entirely inappropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Public Service Pensions

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier says that we should slash the pensions of over 300,000 retirees because we need to, quote, live within our means. But I think the Premier could benefit from a workshop on living within one's means. For public-sector retirees, their means are around an average of \$15,000 a year. To convert that into language the Premier can understand, that's just a touch more than a private flight back from a vacation in Palm Springs or about one-third of a trip for two to South Africa. To the Minister of Finance: aren't you even a bit embarrassed about attacking the modest incomes of retired provincial workers in the face of your Premier's repeated display of overindulgence?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, almost two years ago the Premier asked me to work with the pension boards through the local authorities pension board, the public-sector pension board, the Management Employees Pension Board, and the special forces board, all of whom are made up of members of those unions and those payers in the system, if you will, to ensure the sustainability of pensions into the future. She also asked that I would look at all of the options, including the DC option, which is the Wildrose Alliance's option of defined contributions, including, perhaps, even some other options. There was a resounding that they wanted to protect the defined benefit plan. In order to protect the defined guarantee, we must make some changes for the future.

Ms Notley: Well, given that this government has decided to actually eliminate the retirement security provided by guaranteed inflationary protection and given that this will mean seniors who

have devoted decades of service to this province will slowly slip into poverty as they age, will the Minister of Finance at least be making the same cuts to the Premier's travel budget so that she will eventually be forced to fly commercial, make the odd transfer in L.A., and perhaps take the occasional red-eye like the rest of us?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wish that members opposite would stop trying to scare retirees with misinformation. We are not getting rid of the guarantee for defined benefit contributions. Eighty per cent of Albertans do not have a defined benefit plan. The public sector has a guarantee of a percentage of probably what would be their highest earnings in their work with the public sector, a guarantee of a percentage of that for life. That guarantee stands. It stands today. It will stand after the changes. What will change is being able to afford to pay cost-of-living adjustments every year of . . .

Ms Notley: Given that the average pension payout is a mere \$15,000 per year and given that the PC decision to eliminate the 85 factor has been estimated to represent a 20 per cent clawback from that very group, instead of standing behind the Premier's lavish spending habits, why won't this government stop picking on people who can least afford it and reverse the mean-spirited attacks on our public-sector workers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the hon. member has been, but if she was to look around the world, defined benefit programs are under stress. They're under stress because we're living longer. We have not the same number of people coming into the system as are now dependent upon the system. That's very evident in all of these plans. What we have done is presented to the membership of the plans a compromise from where we were before. In fact, we are not getting rid of the early retirement subsidies. We are changing from an 85 to a 55, to a 90-60. There are still early retirement provisions with full pension at age 60 within the new proposals.

Electricity Market Investigation

(continued)

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, shocking news: the government's own Market Surveillance Administrator is now satisfied companies have been rigging electricity prices since 2011. This is three years of stealing from seniors, low-income families, and Alberta's businesses. Last May that minister accused the Wildrose of fear-mongering when we brought this issue forward. When will this government get its head out of the sand and put a stop to this stealing from Albertans once and for all?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, if you wish.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Thank you for the third question today. I want to respond to this question by focusing on consumers. Again, I want to restate that we cannot prejudice the outcome of this case, and I hope that the hon. member understands that. If market manipulation did take place, the government has given the AUC the ability to charge penalties of up to a million dollars a day and also to claw back any economic benefits. Consumers are a priority. If the AUC levies a fine, this government will ensure that those funds go to consumers.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: Given that the last time TransAlta got caught stealing \$5 million from Albertan ratepayers, they had to pay a fine of \$380,000, why should Albertans trust this government or the AUC to even care when the punishment for stealing from consumers is nothing more than a cost of doing business?

The Speaker: Hon. members, we allow a lot of leeway here. I'd caution you to be very careful when you use the word "stealing" going forward, okay?

Mr. Anglin: Absolutely.

The Speaker: I don't see anybody rising on a point of order yet, but it's sure to come.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Again, I must remind this hon. member that we cannot prejudice the outcome of this case. It's being reviewed by the AUC as it should be. I restate that we care about consumers. Consumers will be looked after if there is a problem here.

Mr. Anglin: Given that the MSA allegations are, in effect, allegations of fraud, theft, destruction of evidence, all of which are criminal in nature, will this government ask the RCMP to investigate and file criminal charges as necessary and hold these companies and individuals to account?

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you rose on a point of order, I assume, at 2:39?

Mr. Campbell: Yes.

The Speaker: Let's go on with the answer to the question here.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To conclude, I hope, the RCMP will make their decision about what they do. This member is getting way ahead of himself. This decision has yet to be reviewed by the Alberta Utilities Commission. They have the ability to do that. They have the authority to do that. I would like to let them do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Bullying Prevention

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than 26 per cent of Albertans believe that bullying is just a part of growing up. Last week many members of this Assembly wore pink to help change that stigma and stand up against bullying. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Education. Given that bullying is a concern for many parents and students of all ages, what processes are in place in our schools to ensure that bullying is dealt with in a serious manner?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member for the question and for being such a strong advocate for her constituents. On this particular issue I know that she as a former teacher is well in tune with it. You know, bullying in any form, anywhere, at any time in our schools is unacceptable, and we've set very high standards and expectations for school boards. One of the biggest things we've done recently is the Education Act. We passed some of the strongest language of expectations with respect to anti-bullying language in the entire country. I'd also point out that we've got a new Associate Minister of Family and Community

Safety, which makes a great statement for this government in terms of our priorities. In short, there are lots of tools out there. There is lots of support and even higher expectations on the roles and responsibilities of school boards and parents . . .

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

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: if parents are unhappy with how bullying is being addressed at their child's school, whether it be lack of initiative or consequences, what other options are available to ensure that a fair course of action is taken?

2:40

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the first thing we always encourage parents to do is to try to resolve the issue locally. Obviously, that means talking with teachers and if unsatisfied there, of course, talking with the administrator at the school. But if they don't get satisfaction, the autonomy, the authority, and the responsibility for this rests with the local school board. Then they've got the superintendent to deal with. They've got an elected board, duly elected officials that have a lot of responsibility. If they're not getting satisfaction, if they're not happy with the outcomes, we welcome them to come to our office or work through our local MLAs. But, obviously, first we want them to work with the local schools and the local school boards.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. My final question is to the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety. At the community level where would you direct children and families who encounter bullying?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, every community has its own unique needs when it comes to resources for bullying and cyberbullying, and we are very proud in this government to have created a toll-free provincial bullying helpline. It's 1.888.456.2323. It's a wonderful resource. It's available in more than 170 languages 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is fantastic. We appreciate the fact that a lot of people use it. It is a great resource.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Cross.

School Construction in Blackfalds

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost one full year ago the community of Blackfalds in my riding got some really good news, or so they thought. A new K to 6 school for the community was announced. But it is now one year later, and the only work that has been undertaken at the site has been the completion of a large Building Alberta sign. Can the Minister of Education please explain to my constituents when Blackfalds' new school will consist of more than just a couple of signposts and a PC billboard?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question. I can assure you that the first piece of work we do isn't when the hole gets dug. There's a lot of planning going on, and our schedule for that school is still 2016. We've got all the people working diligently to make that happen, and I expect that the people of Blackfalds are looking forward with much anticipation to that school. It's part of our building Alberta plan. It's a commitment

that this Premier and this government made, and we have every intention of fulfilling that very commitment.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, there are many communities in Alberta that are waiting for schools. Given that the government lists that the project is under way on their online inventory of school announcements, can the minister please explain why not a single shovel has been in the ground since officials left the site of the announcement? Show me the shovels, minister.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my earlier answer, we intend to have those schools open in 2016. That's still the plan. The shovels will be there in due course, but those people in those communities around Alberta ought to be very glad they chose this Premier and this government, with our building Alberta plan, because the opposition, with their smoke and mirrors plan, would not be providing the infrastructure that Albertans need and depend upon, the ones they asked us to deliver and the ones that this Premier and this government are delivering. That's why we're here. That side would not be providing the infrastructure that Albertans need.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, the clock is ticking. Will the students of Blackfalds be in their new school before the 2016 election is called, as your government has promised? Yes or no?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will be glad to know that he's essentially quoting the Premier. When she asked me to be the Infrastructure minister, she said: minister, the clock is ticking. She said: we want to get those schools open in 2016; it's your job and your ministry's job to get it done. Those are the instructions and the directions I'm working under, part of the building Alberta plan. It's a promise made. We intend to have it a promise kept. We're committed to it.

Physiotherapy Services for Seniors

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, many seniors are slipping and falling in this cold weather, and they need physiotherapy to recover from their injuries. As you know, physiotherapy is not covered by the Alberta health care insurance program, the plan, and coverage through other programs is very, very limited. My question today is to the Minister of Health. Seniors in my constituency want to know what you will do, Mr. Minister, to ensure they have access to physiotherapy without causing them financial hardship.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an excellent question, and the weather that we have experienced this winter brings to mind a number of hazards that seniors face, particularly those who are living independently in the community and many of them alone.

We continue to be committed to supporting seniors to live independently. They have a number of options currently available to them when it comes to a full spectrum of health care services. This includes physiotherapy. A number of publicly funded physiotherapy services are offered through community rehabilitation programs across the province, and in this instance the physio-

therapist determines the number of treatments that will be publicly funded.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker, given that seniors often need additional treatment for physiotherapy over and above what is available, my question is: will you look at programs to cover physiotherapy needed to help keep the seniors living independently in their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Physiotherapy is one of several supports that can be made available to seniors to help them. Obviously, when the issue of a fall arises, the involvement of physicians and physiotherapists and occupational therapists and other professionals is warranted, but seniors have a number of choices, as I have said, when it comes to accessing these services. Low-income seniors who require publicly funded physiotherapy can continue to access these through the flexible community rehabilitation programs that we have in place. Some services that are not covered by government are available through private and other plans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, that's the problem. Some services aren't available through government, and as I said, the programs are limited and not everyone is in the low-income stream. In fact, they're just above that, so they're caught in this very serious situation.

My question to you, Mr. Minister, is: will you consider reversing your current health care policy to restore the physiotherapy funding for seniors that was lost five years ago? It is my sincere hope that you will say yes.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can commit to and what we have already committed to is increasing access to all primary health care for seniors, including access to physiotherapists through family care clinics and through primary care networks. I will certainly admit to the hon. member that I in my own constituency have received letters from seniors who feel that the number of physiotherapy visits that are covered through the community rehabilitation program may not be sufficient to meet their needs. We will review that. But it would of course be short sighted to look only at that aspect of support for services for seniors that is needed in Alberta today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Medicine Hat Landfill Fire

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much to the relief of Cypress county, the Westar Landfill fire, that raged for a month, was extinguished at the start of the new year. Residents were displaced, toxic materials were burned, and chemicals were released. At this point we don't know what caused the fire, but we do know that not one provincial check was done to monitor proper protocol. Can the minister of environment explain why his government took a do-nothing approach to ensure that the proper dumping procedures were being followed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I disagree wholeheartedly with the member. My department is currently investigating this fire and its cause. Once the investigation is complete, my department will determine if any of the environmental authorizations or regulations were not followed, and appropriate enforcement action will be taken. Enforcement actions can include warnings, administrative penalties, orders, or charges. My department also has monitored air quality extensively during the course of the incident. From January of this year results from the air monitoring are posted on our website. Nothing of concern has been identified at this time.

Mr. Barnes: Given that this situation revealed how serious the consequences could be for all associated and all in the neighbourhood, what is the government doing to ensure that private dump sites are going to be held accountable in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we took immediate action on the Westar site as soon as we could, and we had people evacuated because we were concerned about health issues. Once those health issues were alleviated, we brought people back in. I can tell this member that I've authorized my department to go out and start doing – I forget the word. Anyways, they're going to go and look at landfill sites without the people knowing they're coming, unannounced.

Mr. Barnes: The government was nowhere around before this happened, Mr. Speaker. Now, with the total cost of the fire past \$2 million, will the government commit to reimbursing Cypress county for expenditures that proper government of Alberta oversight in the first place could have prevented?

2:50

Mr. Campbell: As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, this is under investigation right now, and I won't comment until the investigation is completed.

The Speaker: I believe the bell rang, Mr. Clerk, did it not? So 30 seconds from now I will proceed with the first of several members' statements.

Before we go, Government House Leader, do you have a point?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, before we proceed to Members' Statements, I'd ask that due to Standing Order 7(7) we extend the Orders of the Day past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Je me lève aujourd'hui pour souligner les 16e Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, une célébration nationale de la langue, du patrimoine, et des cultures françaises.

Du 7 au 23 mars près de 10 millions de francophones à travers le Canada participeront dans des festivités. Le thème de cette année, La joie de vivre d'hier à demain, cadre bien avec notre province. De Plamondon à Grande Prairie, de Fort McMurray à Lethbridge, des communautés à travers l'Alberta souligneront le

début des festivités ce vendredi avec des levers de drapeaux symboliques. Les francophones comme les Anglophones se rassembleront pour le lever du drapeau franco-albertain, un symbol d'unité qui représente l'entrelacement de nos cultures, de nos gens, et de nos langues.

Comme vous le savez, M. le Président, il y aura beaucoup d'occasions pendant le mois pour que les Albertains participent à des célébrations, de rassemblements communautaires à des activités éducatives. Même ici à la rotonde de la Législature vous accueillerez les membres de cette Assemblée et le public lors d'une réception dans le cadre des Rendez-vous le 10 mars.

Aujourd'hui notre population francophone est en croissance et devient de plus en plus plurielle et vibrante. Avec plus de 239,000 Albertains qui parlent français, les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie sont une excellente occasion pour tous les Albertains à sortir, célébrer la diversité culturelle et linguistique, et à découvrir ce que nos communautés francophones offrent à notre province.

Merci à tous les membres de l'Assemblée pour leur appui continu de cette célébration culturelle vibrante. Je vous encourage tous à prendre part aux activités de cette année.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to highlight the 16th annual Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national celebration of French culture, language, and heritage. From March 7 through 23 close to 10 million francophones across Canada will take part in the festivities. This year's theme, Joie de vivre d'hier à demain, Joy of Living from Yesterday to Tomorrow, couldn't be more fitting for our province. From Plamondon to Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray to Lethbridge, communities across Alberta will kick off the festivities this Friday with ceremonial flag-raising ceremonies. Francophones and anglophones alike will come together to raise the Franco-Albertan flag, a symbol of unity that represents the interconnection of our cultures, peoples, and languages.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there will be many opportunities for Albertans to participate in celebrations throughout the month, from community gatherings to educational activities. Even here in the Legislature Building rotunda you will be welcoming members of this House and the public to a reception in celebration of the Rendez-vous on March 10.

Today our francophone population is growing and becoming even more culturally and ethnically vibrant. With more than 239,000 Albertans who speak French, Rendez-vous de la Francophonie is a great opportunity for all Albertans to get out, celebrate our cultural and linguistic diversity, and experience the incredible joie de vivre that our francophone communities bring to our province.

My thanks to all of the members of the Assembly for their continued support of this vibrant cultural celebration. I encourage everyone to take part in this year's activities.

Merci. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Shaw, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus recently released our vision for municipal funding, something we call the 10-10 community infrastructure transfer. Municipal funding can be a complex issue, particularly under the current system; however, our plan is very easy to understand. The first thing you may note is that this is a transfer, not a patchwork of grants. This is the

key difference between the status quo and a truly sustainable future under Wildrose leadership. A Wildrose government would bundle together 10 per cent of the revenues collected from personal and corporate income taxes as well as education, tobacco, and fuel taxes and flow it directly through to the municipalities. The 10-10 community infrastructure transfer will result in more money reaching municipalities through ironclad block funding with no strings attached.

We believe this is exactly the type of funding arrangement Edmonton and Calgary will require to build out their transportation and LRT networks without having to impose punitive new taxation on Alberta families. Just to clarify for all stakeholders and especially the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who managed to completely miscalculate the totals of his own government's funding in a press release, under a Wildrose government all municipalities would be better off.

It is well known that a strong and effective opposition can lead a government. I'm sure this is why in the throne speech yesterday we heard the renewed commitment of a previously broken promise to again increase funding to municipalities. If the budget does in fact have more money flowing to municipalities on Thursday, we in the Wildrose can rest assured that our announcement of the 10-10 community infrastructure transfer played a role in achieving this small victory.

I say "small victory," Mr. Speaker, because with this PC government you never know when they're going to change their mind. Bottom line: under a Wildrose government our municipalities wouldn't have to wait for good news in a budget or a throne speech. They would have a true partner that respects their roles, values their contributions, and recognizes that their future success is integral to Alberta's future success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Stony Plain.

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville Police Services

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to recognize the work of RCMP officers in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville as well as those across the province. These are the individuals who put their lives on the line every day. They go to work making our communities a safer place. These are the individuals who deliver our province's police services and face situations that are unimaginable for many Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, early this past January the dedicated men and women of the Vegreville, Tofield, and Two Hills RCMP detachments were called into action to protect our community after a resident had several firearms stolen from their home by intruders. More than five Mounties were called into the line of fire after a dangerous standoff with a suspect. Two individual officers sustained injuries as a result of their tremendous efforts, and they are still recovering.

These Mounties, the several others from other detachments called in, and all of our law enforcement officers are courageous men and women in our province, who every day go above and beyond so selflessly to aid others in their time of need. These are the people that I would like to salute today. As the MLA and a resident of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville I want to extend my sincerest thanks and gratitude for their unwavering dedication to ensuring that all Albertans have safe communities to live, work, and to raise our families in. Our communities are so grateful.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Grain Rail Transportation Backlog

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I call attention to an issue impacting our agricultural sector and one causing immense concern in my constituency and in the constituencies of many of my colleagues. It's been a challenging few months for our agricultural community. This province's grain elevators are filled to the rafters while the ships intended to take Alberta's grain to market are in port. Our government is committed to providing the opportunity for all businesses to succeed, but this problem is out of our control. That's why I'm addressing the misinformation regarding the lack of rail cars available to haul Alberta grain to market.

Some have heard that the backlog is caused by a disproportionate amount of rail cars seconded by the oil and gas industry; others have heard about a shortage of total rail cars; and others, because of the Canadian Wheat Board transition. This is simply not true. Many industries are facing the same problem. It must be addressed. Other commodities, such as lumber and oil, are unable to find adequate rail shipping. This is not a new problem. There were complaints about rail service before.

Canada's railway network, which is responsible for moving our grain to market, is a federal responsibility. We are fully supportive of the federal government introducing legislative changes to make the system more accountable through direct and immediate penalties for whichever part of the system is responsible for the backlog, including inadequate rail service. I believe that legislating greater financial accountability in the rail system is one meaningful change that will yield more meaningful results.

Market access is a top priority for our government and is one of the key pillars in our efforts to continue building Alberta. Our reputation as a world-class supplier of food, energy, and other exports is at risk if we are unable to meet the needs of our customers in a timely fashion, so it is imperative that immediate steps be taken to improve the efficiency of our rail transportation network.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Fallen Four in Memoriam

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nine years have passed since the national historic RCMP tragedy in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency shook the country. Candle lights flickered at the Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe last night as the community gathered to bring light into the darkness that descended on March 3, 2005, when four young RCMP officers were shot and killed north of the town. We have healed and moved on, but we do not forget the lives of constables Peter Schiemann, Leo Johnston, Brock Myrol, and Anthony Gordon, that ended tragically that day. I ask you to join me in remembering them, their families, friends, troop mates, co-workers, and the communities of Mayerthorpe, Whitecourt, and surrounding areas that embraced them.

3:00

Thanks to the Mayerthorpe Fallen Four society there's a beautiful six-acre memorial park that was built to honour Peter, Leo, Brock, and Anthony plus all police and military forces. It reminds us all that wounds heal and that a new beauty is possible in time through nature and community spirit. In this park four

bronze statues stand on guard with a 24-foot centrepiece that salutes all peace and police officers, all soldiers, and all those who have given their lives for their uniform. The volunteers who built this park, maintain it, and bring everybody together for the candle-lighting service are true Albertans, proud of those that protect us and ensure those who are gone are never forgotten.

Today, colleagues, I wear my Fallen Four pin with pride as a reminder that the brave are forever remembered, and I ask everybody in this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Slave Lake Health Services

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Slave Lake is in serious trouble. In 2011 the community of Slave Lake had doctors, a surgeon, an anesthesiologist, a full dialysis unit, and a functioning operating room to meet patients' needs. These services are essential because Slave Lake faces high birth rates and also high mortality rates, close to double the provincial average. Being a young and growing remote community means there is a critical need for urgent care services and access to their doctors.

In 2012 the Premier decided Slave Lake would play host to her experimental family care clinic idea, an experiment introduced with little consultation, without guidelines, no parameters, and was not even supported by physicians and health care professionals across this province. Let's look at the effect of becoming the pet project for the Premier's next big idea.

In 2011 Slave Lake had 11 doctors. Today they have less than half that. In fact, they now have a lower doctor-to-patient ratio than the whole country of Nigeria. In 2011 Slave Lake had one anesthesiologist. Today they have none. In 2011 Slave Lake had a functioning operating room. Today nothing. In 2011 Slave Lake had a fully functioning dialysis unit. Now the residents have to drive three hours to Edmonton. In 2011 Slave Lake mothers could give birth in their own communities. Not anymore.

Despite this the PC government insists family care clinics are a success. This government talks about everyone having a home in the health care system, but for Slave Lake that home is somewhere else, not in their own community. The PC government, the Health minister, Alberta Health Services have let Slave Lake down.

However, there is hope. The Premier, the PC government can respect local decision-making. They can work with their stakeholders, with their community, and they can put this community first. They can swallow their pride. They can admit that the plan to ensure that Slave Lake's family care clinic was a success has failed. They can also offer the community of Slave Lake actual access to primary health care. To the Premier, to the minister, to Alberta Health Services: it's okay to admit you were wrong; make this right.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We have several tablings. Please do your best to be as brief as you can.

The Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Statistical Supplement for 2012-13, detailing payments to physicians and for supplementary drug benefits in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Meadowlark, I understand there are two tablings. Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is the evaluation report from the Leger research and development group on Reach Edmonton's schools as community hubs program, which, of course, they have found produced a value of \$4.60 for every dollar invested.

The second tabling on behalf of the leader of the Liberal opposition is an article, Health Stats Veer Off Course, and that to change things on the run with the new budgeting format is not helping things in health care.

May I continue, Mr. Speaker? I have tablings on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo and one from myself.

The Speaker: Yes. I see there are about five tablings for Calgary-Buffalo and one for yourself, so why don't you get them all done now.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I can't see all five tablings for Calgary-Buffalo, so he's going to get what he's going to get.

The first one that I would like to do, Mr. Speaker, is the report by the MSA, the Market Surveillance Administrator. I'll just draw everyone's attention to page 3, in which it says that "the MSA accepts that economic withholding is rational profit maximizing behaviour, for example, when a market participant has long portfolio position." That will not be questioned or challenged. So what they did, they were allowed to do. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague for Calgary-Buffalo.

The second tabling I have for him is a report by Deloitte on Alberta Infrastructure, the RFQ for 19 schools located in southern and north-central Alberta.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my beloved – oh, it isn't my beloved constituency. Well, it's on behalf of David McIntyre, who believes that the Alberta government should do everything they can to save Alberta's heritage rangelands. "Please give these lands bottom-to-top protection as part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Finance, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. On behalf of the Premier it's my pleasure to table the letters to the Auditor General that the Premier mentioned in her responses today. These letters are asking the Auditor General to review the travel and expense policies and specifically the office of the Premier as one of the examples for him to start with as well as to review the government of Alberta's air transportation service and the use of the planes. In addition, in this letter it is noted that the Premier's direction to myself as President of Treasury Board is to suspend out-of-province travel on all ATS planes and to look at the costing that we use for the government of Alberta planes. That would be the first tabling.

The second tabling is a letter from the Premier to myself outlining an ambitious piece of work for us to undertake that would be around the government's travel and expense policy, that we are to look to an RFP process for preferred providers in the area of travel and expenditure and air travel and hotels, et cetera, which we will be undertaking tout de suite, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Calder, you're next.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the appropriate number of copies of a petition of almost 3,000 signatures from the citizens of Slave Lake and area who are very concerned about the state of health care in their community. The petition was calling for the PC government to act in order to save the Slave Lake doctors who are being forced to leave the community. Basic and essential health services have been removed; for example, maternity care. These need to be restored immediately as well.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others? If not, I have a tabling that I would like to proceed with. In my capacity as chair of the Members' Services Committee and pursuant to section 39(3) of the Legislative Assembly Act I'm going to table with the Assembly five copies of the following orders, that were approved at the December 10, 2013, meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: the first being the Constituency Services Amendment Order 28, that being Order MSC 12/13; the second being the Transportation Amendment Order 12, that being Order MSC 13/13; and the third one is the Members' Services Committee Amendment Order 1, that being MSC Order 14/13.

3:10

Let us move on, then, with points of order. I believe we have three or four to deal with.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: We are going to start with Edmonton-Strathcona. You had a point of order at 2:16 p.m. Let's hear it, please, with the citation.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The citation is 23 (h), (i), and (j), and it relates to the Premier's comments in response to the question that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I, of course, don't have the Blues, but I do have the question that the member himself asked, and I have a clear recollection of the Premier suggesting that the member was misleading the House with his question.

In his question he asked the Premier: why won't she recognize that her exorbitant use of public funds for travel and excessive security and use of government aircraft and staff severances is a poor contrast to the frozen wages and reduced pensions that they are proposing for public employees? Then the Premier responded to that by accusing the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood of misleading the House.

Now, the parliamentary authorities are quite clear that the term "misleading the House" has been found to be unparliamentary, and Speakers on repeated occasions have called upon members who have accused others of misleading the House to offer an apology. Although, frankly, we don't have to get into a long discussion of the facts because we do know that the language in and of itself is unparliamentary regardless of whether or not the statement made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is accurate.

I will, however, suggest that Bill 46, which, of course, granted, is somewhat up in the air right now given the proclamation through judicial review about what an outrageous piece of legislation it is, notwithstanding that fact, that piece of legislation proposed for April 1, 2014, to March 30, 2015, is a freeze on public-sector salary and wages of zero.

You know what? We can't talk about what lovely little discussions are going on behind closed doors. Strangely, I think it's kind

of reasonable for us as members of this Assembly to hold this government to account for pieces of legislation that they bring in and pass through this Assembly, even those pieces of legislation that subsequently receive outrageous levels of criticism by the judiciary as that particular piece of legislation did. I think it is quite reasonable for the member to have suggested that this government is freezing public-sector wages.

We also know that the ATA deal, which was legislated by this government, also imposes zero per cent for this particular year. I believe the government claims same thing for the doctors, although I'm less clear on that one.

Regardless, I think it's arguable that what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said is absolutely true, in fact. As well, the government is proposing to reduce pensions, and no amount of spin can get past the fact – and we'll have lots of opportunity to discuss that – that the changes that this government is making to pension plans will result in a loss of income to future pensioners.

That being said, that's what the member said. Now, had the member actually said that the Premier was dressed up like a unicorn, even then the Premier would not have been able to suggest that the member was misleading the House because that is the parliamentary tradition. The fact of the matter is that it might simply have been a misinterpretation or mistake about whether or not she was dressed up like a unicorn. Although, you know.

Anyway, the point is that it was an unparliamentary statement by the Premier, and I would respectfully request that the Speaker ask that the Premier offer an apology to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and withdraw the statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to respond.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was quite a diatribe of nothing to do with the point of order. The member did make some comments that were misinformed and did, in my mind, lead me to believe that I didn't know what was going on at that bargaining table. The member talks about three zeros, which he knows is not true. If you look on the AUPE website and if you look at the offer with prejudice to the union, it's \$1,550, \$1,550, \$775, 1 per cent, 2 per cent, and then paid holidays between Christmas and New Year's for the second, third, and fourth years of the agreement, Mr. Speaker. So those aren't zeros. That's actually almost 10 per cent over four years when you look at the math on that.

Mr. Speaker, the member also talked about the fact that we're reducing pensions. That, again, is categorically untrue. We are not reducing pensions at all within the public sector.

As the House leader for the fourth party went on about all of the things, the fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that the Premier called the member to task because he was misleading this House in talking about issues that aren't there. At no time can we now go back to zeros, because with the with-prejudice argument that we put on the bargaining table, we are held to that final offer. Again, let me say that that's \$1,550 the first year, \$1,550 the second year, \$775 the third year with a 1 per cent increase on the grid, 2 per cent on the grid the fourth year, and paid days between Christmas and New Year's for all members that are nonessential services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a pretty simple case, I would think, rather cut and dried. There was a question

asked by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. In the response the Premier suggested that that member was in fact trying to mislead this House. It is a long-standing tradition in this facility, in all parliaments, that that is language that is deemed unparliamentary. Look no further than *Beauchesne's* 489. It's very clear in there, and this is not a case where I believe that there can be multiple interpretations of a phrase. It was very clear what the Premier was trying to say. She was trying to deflect from the responsibility that her government has taken and actions that her government has taken, and quite truthfully she was trying to deflect from the actions that she had taken in a trip to South Africa. Now, I am not going to, in this argument on the point of order, get into the long details around that trip. We all know what they are.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it is unparliamentary for this Premier to stand in this Assembly and tell this Assembly that a member is intentionally misleading the House. It is that simple, and I would echo the member's comments, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and I would ask that you rule that the Premier apologize and withdraw that remark.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Well, I've stood in this House a number of times to comment on parliamentary language and unparliamentary language, and I've told most of you at least half a dozen times that tone is important, temperament is important, context is important.

I received the Blues just a minute or two ago, so let me just refresh your memories as to what happened. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood stood and said the following:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The one thing I don't understand is the Premier's double standard. Why won't this Premier recognize that her exorbitant use of public funds for travel, excessive security, use of government aircraft, and staff severances is an unfair and unjust contrast to frozen wages and reduced pensions for public employees in our province?

Shortly thereafter the Premier stood and said the following:

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to ask me questions with respect to this circumstance, that's fine, but it is entirely inappropriate for this hon. member to mislead the House with respect to AUPE negotiations or pension reform. It is not appropriate to suggest for any reason that the great work that our Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has done with respect to pension reform will not be helpful to public servants in the future. Let's remember that as we saw last week, our better offer to AUPE involved wage increases for four years.

Now, I don't know about most of you, but I can tell you that I'm not privy to those particular discussions, so I don't know what went on in them. I don't know where negotiations stand. I don't know who's at the table. What I do know, though, is that an allegation has been appropriated here to a member of the House by suggesting that he misled the House with respect to AUPE negotiations or pension reform. I'm going to wait until I get the rest of the Blues just to make sure that I'm adjudicating this correctly, but frankly I do think that was an unfortunate choice of words, to accuse someone of misleading the House. We've had the point clarified here. Nonetheless, I will ask if under the circumstances the hon. Government House Leader would do the honourable thing and simply ask that on behalf of the Premier those words be withdrawn.

3:20

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. They're unfortunate, the words the Premier used, but she just wanted to make

sure that all Albertans did know the truth about negotiations and about pensions. On your recommendation I will withdraw the comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

That closes that matter, but please let it stand as a warning to all of you. We're looking forward to a very productive session. Today was pretty good, and members were in fairly good form. I will be clamping down on all of these points regardless of who says them, so please know that in advance.

Let us move on.

Point of Order Anticipation

The Speaker: We had a second point of order, by I think it was Edmonton-Centre against Edmonton-Gold Bar, at 2:20 p.m.

Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to use as my citations on anticipation *Beauchesne's* 408(1)(a), 409(5), 409(12), and 410(14), all of which are different versions of a request or an outlining that anticipation should not be – and I think the clearest way it's put is in 410(14). "Questions should not anticipate an Order of the Day although this does not apply to the budget process."

Now, Mr. Speaker, as you and other Speakers have reminded us in this House repeatedly, when it appears on the Order Paper, it can be called any time. Although it may not be on the House leaders' agreement for the day, it could of course be called, and sometimes the government does that if they want to have a bit of mischief. Lo and behold, when I look at the Tuesday, March 4, 2014, Order Paper, on page 6, halfway down the page, it does say: Government Bills and Orders, Second Reading, Bill 1, Savings Management Act, Hon. Madam Premier. In fact, we do have this on the Order Paper. It's there for anyone that wishes to reference it. Standing to ask a question about something that is on the Order Paper for debate is, I believe, a tragic misuse of time.

Now, I'm going to go on and talk about the principles of question period, which appear in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 501. It's specifically talking about the need for urgency in questions and accountability and keeps making the statement that time is scarce. Now, Mr. Speaker, I have repeatedly complained to you and to previous Speakers on just about any opportunity I can get about what I believe is an inappropriate number of questions that are allocated to government members and inappropriate placement in the rotation. This Assembly is the only one in Canada that gives such prominent placement to government backbenchers in question period, both the number of questions that they get and how high they appear in the rotation.

This was a perfect example of why it is so wrong, Mr. Speaker. By that member asking a question that was, one, inappropriate and, two, mischievous or perhaps his version of levity – I don't know; he will, I'm sure, tell us – he took away a question from an opposition member who was trying to be here and do what we are supposed to be doing as a principle in question period, which is a matter of urgency and which holds the government to account. So I would say that what the member was doing was a perversion of the principles and guidelines for oral questions.

I'll also make note that since the government members do have that time – and I have been assured they need that time in the rotation and the number of questions so they can bring forward urgent, terrifically important questions from their constituents –

then I would rather expect that that would be what was happening. So I think this is a very good example of why government members should not have questions in question period. If they do, they should be restricted to a very low number, two or three, at the end of the rotation. This was an egregious misuse of time in question period.

An Hon. Member: A perversion.

Ms Blakeman: I used “perversion” already. You want it twice?

It was egregious, it is a perversion of what we are meant to do here, and I believe that the member should apologize to this House for having done that. I would certainly ask the Speaker to find that he has breached 408(1)(a), 409(5), 409(12), 410(14) from *Beauchesne*, and the principles found on page 501 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* for oral questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you’ve already answered this point of order by the fact that you didn’t allow the supplementary question by the member, so we get your point, and we’re prepared to move on.

The Speaker: Anyone else? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll briefly comment, just following up on the comments that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre made. I believe that we saw an example today of a good use of a government backbencher asking a question – and that was the Member for Stony Plain – a valid question. It’s unfortunate that it’s such a rarity that it actually stands out in our memory that it happened. All too often we see the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you know, striving to mediocrity, which he again achieved today. It’s a clear violation of Standing Order 23(e): “anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper.” I hope that this is something that we don’t have to deal with again because, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre noted quite clearly, it is an absolute waste of our time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, hon. members, anticipation is accurately portrayed here in our own standing orders, as has been referenced. Because not everybody carries this little bible or booklet around with them, let me read it to you. Under our own standing orders, which are the ones that we’re mostly guided by, item 23 says:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker’s opinion, that Member . . .

- (e) anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day.

With that in mind, let’s review what actually got said. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stood at approximately 2:19 this afternoon and said the following:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday our Premier introduced Bill 1, the Savings Management Act, legislation that will see the creation of two new endowments and enhancements to the Alberta heritage scholarship fund. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Is this really important for Albertans at this time?

At that point Edmonton-Centre rose on a point of order, I acknowledged it, and then the Minister of Finance stood to try and answer the question.

Now, I want to point out one other item here that’s very important for you to read, and that’s in *Erskine May*, 24th edition, page 398, where it says the following about the rule against anticipation:

Formerly, the House strictly observed a rule against anticipation according to which a motion could not anticipate a matter already appointed for consideration by the House, whether it were a bill or an adjourned debate upon a motion. The rule survives in Standing Order No 28, which requires that in determining whether a discussion is out of order on the ground of anticipation the Speaker must have regard to the probability of the matter anticipated being brought before the House within a reasonable time.

In fact, that particular bill, that was cited by Edmonton-Gold Bar, is on the Order Paper today, so that’s one violation there, obviously, because it is coming up for debate very shortly. But it also seeks an opinion, and you have to be very careful, hon. members, when you’re crafting your questions or if you’re getting help with the crafted questions, to make sure that you don’t violate rules of anticipation or the rules that pertain to matters that seek an opinion: is this good, or is this bad? That’s more opinion than it is fact. Please keep that in mind.

I know that members have risen here on occasion and kind of circuitously, perhaps, referred to something that might have been on the Order Paper, so I listen very carefully to those, but this one, I think, is fairly direct and blatant, and as such I do find that there is a point of order here to be upheld. Let that stand as a reminder and an admonishment to all to check the Order Paper and make sure that what your question is about is not going to be in violation of the anticipation rule.

3:30

In closing, let me also remind you, though, that the House of Commons – I believe I’m correct in this – no longer has this rule, and perhaps it’s time that we visited that same rule and withdrew it from our standing orders. That, however, is up to you to determine. But at the moment I can only enforce what is in the rules. So that point of order has been made, upheld, and we can go on to the third point of order now.

I believe we had a third point of order at 2:39. It was the Government House Leader, who rose in response to a comment made by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. We’ll go to the Minister of Justice for the citation.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m rising on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader with respect to citations 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) as well as *Beauchesne*’s 72.

In particular, Mr. Speaker, the reference that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre made was that a member or a minister here should seemingly direct the police, direct the RCMP to investigate a particular matter. It’s well known that we do not simply direct the police. We can report things to the police, but we do not direct them. For example, if I had a problem with the Minister of Human Services, I couldn’t just tell the police to go and arrest him. I would have to simply give the information to them, and they would have to decide, in their sole and unfettered wisdom, whether or not to pursue it. There’s a whole balance of case law in the courts on that.

Particularly, though, with 23(l), “introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly,” again, Mr. Speaker, there’s no business that any of us has directing any police or law enforcement here.

Now, I realize that we're just starting new again. This member has a lot of experience in a lot of areas, so I'm just simply suggesting that he withdraw this statement and refrain from making comments dealing with directing the police in the future.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to quote from *Beauchesne's* 72. It's "well established that outside police forces should not enter the precincts [here] without permission." Obviously, they have nothing to do with us here, and similarly we have nothing to do with them. That is really a key point in a free and democratic society, that politicians do not and should not ever direct the police.

I would just ask that this member kindly withdraw these particular remarks.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you wish to respond?

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regardless of the jurisprudence that the associate minister was referring to, the issue here is the allegations that the Market Surveillance Administrator made, not any allegations that were made by anyone in the opposition.

Now, the allegations comprised two full binders. They're quite extensive, and it's already been documented here today that they're quite significant. I would add that they're quite tragic in nature, and they are extremely severe, being made by the very people who are tasked with monitoring the market.

In other jurisdictions, unlike Alberta, the Market Surveillance Administrator is the adjudicator, and the individual or the company or the parties must then appeal if they don't like the decision. What the hon. member is saying is that I had asked the minister to direct the RCMP. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. I didn't say, "Direct the RCMP" at all. What I asked, which is something this government is fully capable of doing or that any individual here is fully capable of doing, was: will this government ask the RCMP to investigate? Not direct. Anyone can ask; anyone can report.

What we have here is an issue of gaming. That's not under dispute. Those are the allegations being brought forward by the market administrator. I will point out that the Speaker cautioned me on my first supplemental, and justifiably so. I got close, but I didn't cross the line. But it was a justifiable caution when I use language.

Basically, I didn't make any allegations whatsoever. That's what has to be determined here. When the Speaker cautioned on the language that I used in the first supplemental, that was in direct relationship to a previous finding. What the hon. minister has brought forward on the point of order is a point saying that I've requested that they direct the RCMP. I fully understand that nobody directs the RCMP.

Here's what we've got. What we have is a situation where allegations have been made, severe allegations. Gaming is a form of stealing under numerous jurisdictions, and that is not a stretch. You can make that connection when you look at market manipulation. When you can look at gaming, if there's profit made from that gaming, that is looked on as theft.

Now, the allegations extend much further than that. The Market Surveillance Administrator is making allegations that are akin to fraud, theft, and destruction of evidence. Those are serious under all jurisdictions. Those are criminal by nature under Canadian law. We still have the ability to take this from the Market Surveillance Administrator, which is what this government has done, give it to the Alberta Utilities Commission, and say: you adjudicate. There's nothing preventing anybody, particularly the ministry or even the Alberta Utilities Commission, from calling in the RCMP and

saying, "Hey, we've got a bigger issue here," and there is a much bigger issue going on, in my view.

The point that the member is making, that I requested that the minister direct the RCMP: that's not what the question says. If you check the *Hansard*, it says quite simply, "Will this government ask the RCMP?" Anyone has that right to ask the RCMP. That is to make a point of how severe these allegations are. Now, what's missing in this and what's missing in the point of order is all the harm that has been caused over a period of time that is within the allegations, and you can't convince any Albertans that something is not wrong with this system. All these members here have heard the complaints from their constituents, and now we have not just one allegation. It's not the first allegation. This is now a history of numerous allegations that have come forward over the years. We have had findings in the past. I documented that finding in my first supplemental, and we have a pattern here that borders now on corruption. That needs to be dealt with. Corruption itself is a criminal offence.

Again, at what point do we deal with the violation of utility regulations and cross that line into criminal offences and ask the RCMP to investigate? I don't believe what I'm doing here is making any direction or declaration of direction at all to this government. I'm asking the government.

I will finish with that. If you check the *Hansard*, it says quite clearly, "Will this government ask the RCMP?" Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, let me review the circumstances as I saw and witnessed them and have since read about. At approximately 2:36 p.m. the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre stood and said the following:

Given that the last time TransAlta got caught stealing \$5 million from Albertan ratepayers, they had to pay a fine of \$380,000, why should Albertans trust this government or the AUC to even care when the punishment for stealing from consumers is nothing more than a cost of doing business?

I immediately stood thereafter and said to the member the following:

Hon. members, we allow a lot of leeway here. I'd caution you to be very careful when you use the word "stealing" going forward, okay?

I want to remind you all again. You know, what's important here isn't only the language that we use here but the accusations that we attribute against people who are not in this Assembly, who would otherwise be given an opportunity to defend themselves, but because they don't enjoy the privilege of immunity, like we all do, they are at a disadvantage. They cannot stand up and defend themselves. I found the use of the word "stealing" in this instance to be not appropriate, and I stood on that very point, and the member himself has just said that he agrees with my intervention and my admonishment at the time.

There are many different ways to try and get a point across. In this case, you might have used something more polite such as "overcharging" perhaps, if that was the case – I don't know – but certainly I take offence on behalf of others that the word "stealing" is inappropriate here, and it's inappropriate to level some blame at someone who is not here and able to defend himself or herself.

3:40

On the second point, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre went on and in a supplemental said:

Given that the MSA allegations are, in effect, allegations of fraud, theft, destruction of evidence, all of which are criminal in

nature, will this government ask the RCMP to investigate and file criminal charges as necessary and hold these companies and individuals to account?

At that point the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order, which I had anticipated 30, 40 seconds earlier because I could see where this was going.

It's very clear here that the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was not directing or dictating that the RCMP step in or whatever the banter was between the two members earlier today in support or in defence of this particular point of order. He actually did say, "Will this government ask the RCMP?" So I accept that, and *Hansard* will stand as a record of that.

I think that sometimes we are prone to asking very tough questions here, and this was a tough question. This was up to a point, I thought, a fairly well-worded question except for the allegations that were made against somebody not here and the use of the word "stealing." So I'm going to admonish anyone going further in that line of questioning and tell them to please refrain from using that kind of language. The point about the RCMP I think has been sufficiently clarified.

We're going to move on and carry on. That's it: no more points of order. We can go on with Orders of the Day, the former point having been now clarified.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

2. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

3. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

Evening Sittings

4. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2014 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you. Please be seated.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2013-14 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 8(3) of the Fiscal Management Act requires that an updated fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, the 2013-14 supplementary estimates include an amended 2013-14 fiscal plan. The supplementary supply estimates will provide additional spending for 13 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of just over \$2 billion in operational funding, \$223 million in capital funding, and \$11 million in financial transactions funding for the government. The largest share of these amounts will fund the province's ongoing flood recovery activities.

Government Motions

(continued)

5. Mr. Horner moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2013-14 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

6. Mr. Horner moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2013-14 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for six hours on Wednesday, March 5, 2014.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Amendments to Standing Orders

7. Mr. Campbell moved:
 - A Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective March 5, 2013, be amended as follows:
 1. Standing Order 18(1)(h) is amended by striking out " , except as provided under Standing Order 52".
 2. Standing Order 52 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1) by striking out "18" and substituting "15" wherever it occurs;
 - (b) in suborder (3) by striking out " , which shall not be subject to debate or amendment".
 3. Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended
 - (a) by striking out "18" and substituting "15";
 - (b) in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out "Enterprise and Advanced Education" and substituting "Innovation and Advanced Education";
 - (ii) by striking out "and Infrastructure" and substituting "Infrastructure, and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour".
 4. Standing Order 59.01 is amended
 - (a) by striking out suborders (3) and (4) and substituting the following:

- (3) Following consultation with House Leaders, the Government House Leader shall table in the Assembly the schedule for consideration of main estimates at any time following the announcement of the date of the Budget Address and no later than the Thursday preceding the first meeting scheduled, and such schedule shall be published in the Order Paper for the next sitting day.
- (b) in suborder (5)(d) by striking out “for a minimum of 2 hours to a maximum of 6 hours” and substituting “for a maximum of 3 hours”;
- (c) in suborder (6)
- (i) by adding the following after clause (d):
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
- (ii) by striking out clause (f) and substituting the following:
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

- B Be it further resolved that the Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee be authorized to meet during the consideration of the 2014-15 main estimates.
- C And be it further resolved that this motion takes effect upon passage.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

Committee Membership Changes

8. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly’s committees be replaced as follows:
- (1) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Mr. Casey, chair; Mrs. Jablonski, deputy chair; Mr. Amery; Mr. Barnes; Mr. Dorward; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Khan; Mr. Sandhu; and Dr. Sherman.
- (2) Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: Mr. Jeneroux, chair; Mr. McDonald, deputy chair; Mr. Bikman; Ms Blakeman; Dr. Brown; Ms DeLong; Mr. Eggen; Mrs. Leskiw; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Wilson; and Mr. Young.
- (3) Standing Committee on Private Bills: Mr. Xiao, chair; Mrs. Leskiw, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Dr. Brown; Ms Cusanelli; Ms DeLong; Ms Fenske; Mrs. Fritz; Mrs. Jablonski; Ms Notley; Ms Olesen; Mr. Rowe; Mr. Stier; Mr. Strankman; and Dr. Swann.
- (4) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Ms Kubinec, chair; Mr. Rogers, deputy chair; Ms Calahasen; Mr. Casey; Mr. Kang; Mr. Khan; Mr. Luan; Ms Notley; Ms Olesen; Ms Pastoor; Mr. Pedersen; Mr. Saskiw; Mr. VanderBurg; Mr. Wilson; and Mr. Young.
- (5) Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Mr. Anderson, chair; Mr. Dorward, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr.

- Amery; Mr. Barnes; Mr. Bilous; Mr. Donovan; Ms Fenske; Mr. Hehr; Mr. Khan; Mr. Luan; Ms Pastoor; Mr. Sandhu; Mrs. Sarich; and Mr. Young.
- (6) Special Standing Committee on Members’ Services: Mr. Zwozdesky, chair; Mr. VanderBurg, deputy chair; Mr. Casey; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Ms L. Johnson; Ms Kubinec; Mr. Mason; Mr. McDonald; Dr. Sherman; and Mrs. Towle.
- (7) Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future: Mr. Amery, chair; Mr. Fox, deputy chair; Mr. Dorward; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Hehr; Ms Kubinec; Mr. Lemke; Mr. Luan; Mr. McDonald; Ms Pastoor; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Rogers; Mr. Rowe; Mrs. Sarich; and Mr. Stier.
- (8) Standing Committee on Families and Communities: Ms Olesen, chair; Mrs. Forsyth, deputy chair; Ms Cusanelli; Ms DeLong; Ms Fenske; Mrs. Fritz; Mrs. Jablonski; Mr. Jeneroux; Mrs. Leskiw; Mr. McAllister; Ms Notley; Mr. Pedersen; Mr. Sandhu; Dr. Swann; and Mr. VanderBurg.
- (9) Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship: Mr. Khan, chair; Mr. Anglin, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr. Bikman; Mr. Bilous; Ms Blakeman; Dr. Brown; Ms Calahasen; Mr. Casey; Mr. Goudreau; Mr. Hale; Ms L. Johnson; Mr. Webber; Mr. Xiao; and Mr. Young.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

Adjournment of Spring Session

9. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2014 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

3:50 Adjournment of Spring Session

10. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the schedule for the 2014 spring sitting as outlined in the calendar published pursuant to Standing Order 3 be modified to allow for the spring sitting to be extended beyond the first Thursday in June 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 10 carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor’s Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

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

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous honour to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, presented by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta. I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for setting forth the vision of the Second Session of the 28th Alberta Legislature.

I would also like to thank the hon. Premier for the opportunity to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. I am excited by the Premier's vision for Alberta and her commitment to build Alberta and move this province forward on many fronts, from outstanding health care delivery to finding new and expanded ways to get Alberta's products to international markets. Our province is fortunate to have a visionary, proactive leader committed to building a better and more prosperous Alberta that serves the needs of our vibrant communities, peoples, and businesses.

The Speech from the Throne sets forth the next phase of the building Alberta plan, and our constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock is an example of building Alberta. We are having a new school built in Neerlandia. The plans are under way, and the shovels will go in the ground this August. We have a modernization project in our Pembina north schools, that my constituents are very excited about.

This plan is one that will ensure Alberta remains in a position to be the best it can be and a leader on the national and international stages. It signals a commitment to excellence in transparency, determination, and strength. It provides certainty of direction, with a clear blueprint for action that's focused on the three priorities that matter most to Albertans: investing in families and communities, opening new markets for Alberta's resources, and ensuring that the government lives within its means. Significant progress has been made on all three priorities since 2012.

The Speech from the Throne articulates our actions and investments to further this work and ensure that Alberta remains the province of choice for over 4 million people. It clearly outlines how we are investing today in Alberta's future to support the nearly 1 million people expected to join our fine province in the decade to come.

Investments in research and innovation will maintain and grow our world-class resource economy and build the skilled workforce we need to stay strong. To quote from the throne speech, "Alberta is Canada's economic engine." We know first-hand the pressures associated with this prosperity. Our population will grow to 5 million people in the next 10 years, and the Speech from the Throne exemplifies the courage of this government to meet Alberta's growth head-on, to invest today in innovation for tomorrow, and to set our province up for long-term success.

This work includes opening new markets through co-operative efforts with other provinces and other jurisdictions. It includes building our communities through targeted funding for municipalities so that they can successfully address growth pressures. Alberta's success depends on all regions of the province, from Edmonton to Calgary to our vital, small rural centres, so this government will continue to invest in the necessary programs, services, and infrastructure to build on our collective expertise and will to succeed.

This throne speech sets out a commitment to create new supports for research and world-leading innovation to drive growth and economic diversification for years to come. It will fund innovation in rural Alberta to maximize our agricultural and food-processing sectors. It will invest in new ways to encourage collaboration between social and family organizations and non-profits to address important issues like poverty, homelessness, and family violence. It will expand support for apprenticeship, trades,

and technology sectors to build the skilled workforce Alberta needs to remain successful as we grow our markets.

The Speech from the Throne also sets up the action this government will take to ensure that Alberta's kids get the best start in life, from education to health care to social well-being. I think all Albertans will be pleased by this forward-looking approach to governance, that is focused, target driven, and responsible, and one that is committed to putting in place the infrastructure, education, public health care, and social supports to enable all Albertans to be the best they can be in an open, inclusive, and prosperous society.

I am excited to be a part of a government that is committed to building our province, strengthening our communities, investing in our families, and broadening our economic base to realize the full potential of our resources through research and innovation but, most importantly, a government that invests in Albertans.

In closing, I would like to again thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his inspiring words. Again, I thank our Premier for her inspiring leadership and commitment to the people of Alberta.

It has been an honour to rise today and move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it is a pleasure to rise today and speak to the Speech from the Throne. I guess I'll hit it pretty well off the cuff on most of these things. In here we have quite a few things about agriculture, which I think is great because it has been pushed to the back burner for a number of years, so I do appreciate that it's been raised to the level that it has, pointing out that it is the largest renewable resource this province has and the second largest that brings money into this province, behind oil and gas.

Now, some of the challenges that we have in here are – and I'll quote – leading the charge for better rail services to our rural farm families so they can gain international markets, which is a great, warm, fluffy thing to say, but this isn't a new problem. Back in the '90s, when there were problems with grain movement, the province bought numerous cars – I believe it was one per constituency at the time; don't quote me on that because I don't have the exact facts – with the heritage trust fund. Now, my question is that all these cars were out there, and nobody can ever find one. It seems like they've all disappeared. It would be . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I overlooked the fact that the motion needs to be seconded first, and I've got to go over here to Grande Prairie-Smoky. That is my error, not yours. My apologies.

Grande Prairie-Smoky.

4:00

Mr. McDonald: Sorry, Ian. Nice start, anyway.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a privilege to rise today in the House and second the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne. The Alberta that we know and love today is a place where families have the supports they need to thrive and grow, including world-class education and health care, social programs and community services, and essential infrastructure like roads, schools, bridges, and health facilities. As we heard in the Speech from the Throne, this government has an unwavering belief that while our quality of life is great, we can always be better, and the commitments laid out in the throne speech clearly support this vision.

This government will invest in families and communities by building new schools, modernizing old ones, keeping class sizes low, and supporting new spaces for thousands of students. We'll build stronger families and communities by investing in child intervention and addressing family violence and other important social issues like poverty and homelessness. We will ensure that Alberta communities have access to effective services like home care, mental health supports, and enhanced youth outreach programs, and we will continue to dedicate resources and supports to enhance the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our society, low-income seniors and disabled Albertans.

Alberta's success depends on the regions, from cities to towns to smaller rural centres, and this government will help them address growth challenges with renewed long-term funding for GreenTRIP and municipal sustainability initiatives. This government is also investing in our future by creating new supports for research and world-leading innovation to drive continued growth in our economy. These investments will be made in our agricultural sector for new, made-in-Alberta solutions that will get our products to market and in our communities through the social innovation endowment.

To support these investments, this government is opening new markets, as highlighted in the throne speech. Alberta is the economic engine of this country, and we remain in a strong position despite some of the challenges we've faced in recent years. The key to building Alberta is opening new markets and finding fairer prices for our products. The throne speech outlines the many ways that we are focusing our efforts to increase agricultural exports, build new markets for oil and gas across North America, sign trade deal agreements with China, Japan, and India, and fight unfair labelling for our exports.

It also outlines the investments we're making at home for Albertans to ensure that we have a highly skilled workforce and a relevant workforce that has the capacity to grow and diversify along with our economy. This includes the creation of a dedicated pipeline training facility, one that will arm Alberta's workforce with many heavy equipment operators, pipeline construction experts, and land reclamation specialists. We will continue to work to diversify our energy mix to give consumers more choice within our electricity market, including alternative energy and renewable, all of this while we continue to build our savings, maintain the lowest tax structure in Canada, and put ourselves on the path to a balanced budget. This government will continue to live within its means and will continue to invest in the things that matter to Albertans.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I know that our government has the right plan in place. I also know that the government focuses on the things that matter most to the people in Alberta. Alberta will continue to stand as a province of choice, where we all work together every day to retain our high quality of life and open the doors to tomorrow's possibilities. I look forward to working with all of my hon. colleagues in the House as we build a better session this spring.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We're going to go back to the hon. Member for Little Bow, with my apologies once again to that member for the interruption. Standing Order 29(2)(a) will be available following this next speaker.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just clarification on time on this. Ten minutes, is it?

The Speaker: You have 15 minutes plus five minutes under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Donovan: Oh, perfect. Let me stretch my legs out on this, then.

As I was talking earlier about back in the '90s, the grain movement isn't a new problem that we've had in this province, and I am glad that the province has identified it and has been working with their federal counterparts to try to get some grain movement. There are definitely some lingering questions that I get from my constituents about what happened to the railcars that were around back in the 1990s. I'm hoping that at some point we can track down what's happened with that.

My due caution. When the ag minister brings up the statement that we're going to fine the companies for their lack of grain movement, my challenge with that is that as a grain producer, when there are only two companies that move your grain, you're well aware of what's going to come back. They're just going to up your costs. When you pass that on, they're going to pass it on to the producer, with the additional stress to the bottom line. So it's not really going to help us out a lot. Hopefully, we can move forward on that.

I'm glad, again, that the ag minister touched on MCOOL. Also, the throne speech talked about MCOOL, the country of origin labelling. Again, as an agricultural producer these are key things that need to be dealt with that are hurting our economy greatly.

One of the good things I like to see in here – and I guess I always like to be optimistic on what comes out in these. Whether there's actually going to be any backing to it afterwards, that will be the challenge. One of them is the standing of those communities hit hardest last June, the firm commitment to rebuild these and mitigate the projects under way. I'm excited to hear that because my constituency had over 300 homes that were affected by the flood and some of the challenges of fixing that.

One of the challenges also with mitigation is that when you send the water downstream somewhere else, you're hoping that it will be able to be in good hands and capable spots to deal with that. I hope the Minister of Infrastructure has his ears open for this because downstream the Bow River irrigation district has some great plans that could be laid out which would help with any of the water that is sent downstream, to be able to capture that and be able to use it down the road for irrigation and also for off-stream storage. I think those are some things that we need to do.

Now, you can understand that I'd probably have a little bit of a challenge on some of the wording in here: "This government will invest in better seniors' care, focusing funding on aging in place" and on innovative technology for them to stay in their own homes and in the areas where they were raised. We always talk in this province about aging in place, staying in your community. I had a challenge right when I first started this job when in Carmangay a long-term care facility was shut down. Now that's water under the bridge, so to speak. I've worked with the minister on that. Hopefully, we can make that a community project that will turn around to be a better project at the end. You can see that it's one of those challenges that once you've been bit, you're a little bit shy of whether it's actually going to come through or not.

One of the other challenges that comes through from that, if we're going to let people age in place, is rural handibus funding. I've met with municipalities, recently with the MD of Taber, and one of the questions they had was: if we're going to let people age in place, how are we going to fund it so they can safely age in place, be around, and still be functional in their own homes? Transportation is always a challenge. That's one of the things in this Speech from the Throne that I hope the government does

follow on with their own wording. That's something that they could recognize and, hopefully, work with people on.

I guess education is something that is always key in rural Alberta, and I think we want to make sure we have a good education system that allows all students to have the same equal access to education. I'm hoping that that's also something that stays in there.

The Alberta agriculture and food innovation endowment I believe is a welcome addition to the promotion of things that we do make in Alberta, how we can fabricate and make a good product to be able to sell in our own province. One of those things we need to be able to do is make sure how we fund that, and we have the challenges to that.

I guess we have multiple things as we go through the nice orange-and-blue pamphlet we got here. As we talked about earlier here on some of the made-in-Alberta agricultural solutions and getting them to market, the Alberta sugar beet growers, for instance, have lots of challenges on their plates down there in my riding and also in other ridings that are adjacent to it on where their markets are going to be with only one player in the game. I'm hoping also with some of this that there's some actual backing because I'm trying to understand and be able to tell my constituents that there are things actually being done. As the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka talked about earlier today in question period, we put up the signs, but where are the shovels, and when are things actually moving forward? Those are things, I guess, that people in my constituency would definitely like to be able to see.

4:10

We do have great opportunities in this province. I think we should all be proud to say that we're from this province and the things that we have to offer. I think that we need to be able to move forward on that, and we need to be able to figure out how to get our provincial economy back to scale. Part of any good economic program is that – yes, we have a \$40 billion budget, but when we spend \$44 billion, that's maybe not the best way to do math, for any of the economic majors on the other side of the floor.

One of the challenges – and I hear that constantly from my constituents – is: live within your means. We need to be able to do that. I understand that we have lots of challenges and infrastructure things that we need to raise. Every time we ask, it gets tossed back at us that you'd cut it, that we'd have a build-nothing quote. I thought it was quite skilled to tuck that one here in the throne speech. That was a nice touch to it.

My comment is that, you know, I think it gets down to pure politics. Everybody does the banter back and forth, what's not being done right. I think we should probably focus on what we can do right, and one of the things we could do right is figure out how to balance the books, live within our means and make sure we spend accordingly, make sure we get value for our dollar. I think that just about every constituent I ever talk to doesn't have a problem with the money that's being spent in this province, but one of the challenges is: do we actually have value for our dollar on anything that's being spent?

There seemed to be quite a few questions today in question period about a trip to South Africa, I believe. One of those things there is that it becomes an entitlement issue. There's not a constituent that I've talked to who said that that should have been done. They don't disagree with the fact that the Premier was invited to it. They've never disagreed that she couldn't go on a trip like that. It's a matter of the cost and the means and the ways to get there. It goes back to an entitlement issue. I think that it really resonates, you know. So I guess from the constituents I've talked

to, I think that's one of the things that definitely needs to be looked at. I'm even excited to see in the news that the Premier has asked the Auditor General to look at the travel expenses, so I think that's a positive.

One of the things we have in here also, as I was going through the nice pamphlet, is that at the end of the throne speech we talk about our trade barriers within our own borders. These have been challenges for constituents since I've started this job. In the MD of Foothills the Foothills Meat Processors, because it's an abattoir and they actually kill the animal there and cut it and sell it, falls under different rules. They fall under the Alberta Agriculture rules. Now, if that abattoir, for instance, opened a building across the street, brought in the animals and killed them but actually cut the half and sold it at a building across the street, they'd fall under Alberta Health rules, which aren't as stringent on some of the things that need to be done.

Not that I ever think our food is unsafe in this province. I'm a firm believer – and as you can tell by my size, I eat lots of it – that we have great food here, and I'm more than happy with the safety of it. We just need to make sure that all the parties are playing under the same set of rules. I think that something that this province needs to look at is some of the challenges that we have with our rules to make sure that there's a process in there, and then they can follow it so that everybody is on the same page.

As a business owner, you know, there would definitely be a challenge to know that all the rules aren't the same, so I'm hoping that when the line in here says that our internal trade barrier is often more difficult than trade within our own borders and outside, we can figure that out just on our own rules that affect a lot of our agricultural producers and any of the people that work in that market, which is also the meat processing programs and businesses that run with that.

You know, I've tried to stay with what my constituents want. I think our constituents are well aware that we need to spend money on infrastructure that's done in our province. We want to make sure that our value for our dollar is good on that. I encourage our government to please stick with that while they're moving forward on their plan, with the building Alberta together program, I'd assume for the next two years, of where they see things going.

We really need to focus – I guess I'm fairly biased on focusing on rural Alberta. I'm happy with all of our urban centres and the great things they bring us, but rural Alberta brings us lots of vibrant things like the taxes and things like that and the hard-working people that work out there to make Alberta what it is, say, as agricultural producers. I'm glad to see that the throne speech focused multiple times on agriculture. I couldn't be more ecstatic because I've always told people I'm an advocate for agriculture, and I'm willing to work and I always have been willing to work with the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. He's been very helpful to work with, and so has his staff.

I think that at the end, as long as we have a vibrant and strong rural Alberta and Alberta in general, you have a better province to work in. People come in, and they stay in the small towns, and the rural doctors are going to start coming out and working in the rural areas.

The Minister of Health and I have had numerous conversations about doctor retention in rural Alberta. Again, it's another challenge, as we heard today with Slave Lake, about how far people have to travel to be able to deal with a physician in their area. I think people expect levels of service. One of the challenges is that if you're a doctor, what's the incentive to go to rural Alberta and practise? I think we need to figure out a program and a system that works for that, and I assume that the minister – he's tried multiple

things, and I appreciate that because we're not going to get it right every time. He's always willing to give it a whirl, and I hope he continues to do that.

To keep rural Alberta vibrant, we need to keep adding those things. There are lots of neat things out there. The final mile for Internet I think has helped a lot of rural people to be able to stay on the edge of technology that way, and I think that is a positive. I'll try to, I hope, bring their concerns forward, their questions to this Assembly. I'm hoping that at some point, with what's written in here, we can follow through with a lot of that from the Speech from the Throne and actually have something to show Alberta's constituents of what they're going to be able to expect in the next two years. Hopefully, it's not just some lip service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, let me take a moment here to acknowledge the birthday of a gentleman who is celebrating a particular milestone birthday. I don't know what the age exactly is, but I know that he's young enough to not be embarrassed if it were to be known. Please join me in congratulating him on his birthday.

Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, happy birthday, sir.

Are there others who wish to speak to the throne speech? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. It is an honour as always to respond to the Speech from the Throne. The first time I had the opportunity to do this, as many members in my caucus had the opportunity to do, was in our maiden speech, so this is kind of nice to follow up and have another shot at it, this time being a little bit more directly in response to the words that were spoken yesterday by our hon. Lieutenant Governor.

It is always interesting to me to hear a Speech from the Throne laying out a government agenda. I suppose there should really be no surprise that in these documents, in these words, you find a rather, I guess, contrived vision of where it is that we are in our province's history. Obviously, there were a number of references to building. I believe 25 times the word "building" appeared. The building Alberta plan appeared another 12 times. My colleague from Airdrie and I were having a little bit of fun with that yesterday. I don't know if any of you happened to notice our little game we were playing, but you know, it is what it is.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are some things that I do want to specifically address about this document and the speech, some things that just – it kind of boggles my mind how this government had our hon. Lieutenant Governor come and say some of the things that he did. For example, confidence. Page 1, the second-last paragraph: "A place where families have confidence that their government will stay true to its word." I mean, we've seen example after example of this government breaking its word and breaking commitments that it made to the public in the 2012 election campaign to the point where it's lost pretty much all credibility on a number of files, particularly the fiscal file.

You know, I know that we will be seeing a budget later this week and that, again, based on the Speech from the Throne there's a general consensus that they're going to present what they call a balanced budget. But who knows what term or terms they're going to use in which to shake down those numbers to arrive at a balanced number? Last year they changed the way that government finances are reported, and with that, I guess, changed

the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the government management act. It's an unfortunate turn of events.

We get into the building Alberta plan, page 2. Again we have in the second paragraph that "this is a government that will stay true to its promises." You know, it's flabbergasting to me that this appears in here. It's just simply not the case. This is a Premier who will probably most be remembered for not staying true to her promises if she can get past the scandal of the day.

4:20

Another line that this government likes to use all too often, Mr. Speaker: "Ensuring government lives within its means." I'm not sure what this means to the government of Alberta, but what it means to families living in Alberta is that they actually spend less than they take in. What we've seen this government doing consistently year in and year out over the past six years is running deficits and spending more than they take in.

A little bit further down here we have "neither nature's wrath, nor economic fury." Economic fury? The bitumen bubble was economic fury by overestimating the resource revenue income that the province would take in by predicting hundred dollar plus barrels of oil. That's not economic fury. That's poor fiscal planning. Call it what you want, but "economic fury" is certainly not a term that I would have put in here.

The next paragraph. "Investing in families means your government is making good on its key promise to build 50 new schools and modernize 70 more over the next three years." Well, three years from the date that this was read in the House, which will be March 3, 2017, is not the key promise that was made in the election that was held on April 23, 2012. That promise was that these 50 new schools would be built and 70 modernizations done by the election in 2016, which, as all in this House are probably keenly aware, could be called as per the fixed election date legislation pretty much two years from right now. Well, schools don't just magically build themselves, and this government is seemingly taking some credit for schools that were announced by the former Premier in 2011. We've seen members in this House make comments about how some of those 50 new schools have been completed already, but it's just simply not true. We see a large number of building Alberta signs, but unfortunately there are no schools behind those signs.

So I don't understand. Again, here we are on the second page, and we've now made three references to a government that stays true to its promises, one of which is noted as its key promise, and they're not going to deliver on it. Now they're changing the terms so that the key promise is now for the next three years. Well, I guess that even remains to be seen. Like all governments, this government, I'm sure, will be judged in history, and some of these promises – it just boggles my mind that they're putting these on paper and claiming them to be today's promise.

We move on. In the next paragraph we're talking about family care clinics. One of my colleagues earlier today referred to that as a pet project of the Premier. It's really encouraging to see that more FCCs will follow, considering the absolute disaster that one of the first ones was up in Slave Lake. You know, I guess this is what happens when a government puts blinders on to the realities around it. Disasters happen around them, and they don't really care. They're just moving along.

We keep moving on down, and we get down to: "This government is three years ahead of schedule in finishing [the] ring road, [in Edmonton] and will twin Highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray – in full and on time – by 2016." [interjection] I think they are rather encourageable on the other side. But this is a commitment that was originally made in I believe it was 2006. So

I don't know why they're suggesting that this is something that's going to be on time by 2016. That's 10 years later than the date that it was originally announced and certainly not on time by the date that it was originally announced. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. I thought the hon. Minister of Infrastructure had something to add, but I'm sure he'll ask me a question later.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please. The member has the floor.

Mr. Wilson: You know, I'd be happy to table the press release from 2006 announcing the twinning of highway 63 tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

We move on now to page 4. More gold. It's talking about how "the Governments of Alberta and British Columbia signed a landmark agreement to move Alberta's oil and gas to the B.C. coast," which is great. That was a bit of a struggle for our two provinces to come to an agreement, and you know, we're happy that they were able to. Unfortunately, there's still a pile of regulatory framework and its hurdles that we need to go through on a federal level before that's ever going to become a reality.

Signing a provincial energy agreement with China is good, assuming that you can actually get your product to that market, which at this point in time we can't do because we don't have a pipeline out to that coast. Now, we do obviously have some other ways of getting it there through rail or whatnot.

Page 5 we get the goal of putting our – I'm just going to read it because it deserves it.

To meet the commitment under the Building Alberta Plan to live within its means, your government made difficult decisions in Budget 2013 – decisions that helped Alberta turn the corner, putting our province on the path to a balanced budget.

Well, I have got to say that I really appreciated the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood after the Q3 update where he referred to the government as lucky idiots. It's rather fitting that these tough decisions that were made in Budget 2013 really have nothing to do with the fact that your numbers are looking a little bit better. It has everything to do with the state of the Canadian dollar being at around 90 cents. It has everything to do with natural gas prices going up. But I suppose it is the nature of a government to take credit for things which it does not do.

You know, talking about the new single energy regulator, from my understanding from some of the people that I have in my constituency of Calgary-Shaw, this has been somewhat of a problematic drilling season for some of our small producers because the regulator decided to go through an entire review process in December, and it has stalled and delayed what would be the drilling season. I'd hope that this government is well aware of the problems that the single regulator has created for itself at this point in time, although like many other things I don't have high hopes.

Then we get to page 6. Page 6 for me was probably the lowest point of this speech. Again, when we talk about His Honour, our Lieutenant Governor, we're talking about the most decorated living war veteran in our country, and he sat in that chair, Mr. Speaker, and he read this phrase. "Building nothing would sacrifice Alberta's future." [interjection] Pound all you want, Minister, but that is just a shameful thing to have our Lieutenant Governor read in this House because it's a partisan shot on a government talking point that has been proven to be absolutely false about the opposition, and it's in here veiled as part of a throne speech outlining the vision for this province. It is absolutely shameful that this phrase appeared, and it's shameful that

you would support it in the way in which you just did, Minister. But I guess not much surprises me anymore.

I'm looking forward to seeing what the Edmonton and Calgary city charters have to bring. That's going to be an interesting debate. As I referred to earlier in my member's statement, from the bottom of page 7, "your government will renew the long-term funding commitment to the Municipal Sustainability Initiative." Well, there we go again as I refer back to broken promises. In 2012 the Premier promised to take the municipal sustainability initiative from \$846 million, and then the next year it was going to go up to \$1 billion, and in 2014 and years afterwards it was going to \$1.6 billion year after year after year. Well, what happened? Apparently because of economic fury she broke the promise, and it was left at \$846 million. Well, it's encouraging to see that that broken promise will be rectified, and I'm looking forward to seeing on Thursday to what extent. Are they going to go right to the \$1.6 billion as was promised in the election campaign? Who knows what they're going to do.

Talking about the flooding, the "government will make firm the commitment to build community mitigation projects." Definitely important. I'm excited to see what they're doing with new flood hazard mapping as well. The flood hazard mapping, as we all know, was a very critical debate that we had here back in the fall session, something the Wildrose pushed for very, very, hard. I'm happy to see that the government has included this in part of their move forward.

At the bottom of page 8 we get into some of the education issues. Now, this has been a hot topic in Alberta, particularly around the curriculum and assessment piece in education. I have to say that I was a little surprised to hear the Minister of Education today stand and suggest that he was going to change course and he was going to ensure that knowledge and understanding and the multiplication tables in education systems throughout the province will remain as requirements in the Alberta curriculum, which has not been the case recently as per many media reports and a 7,000-signature petition that will probably be tabled in this House at some point. It is an encouraging development.

4:30

But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this is a document that really doesn't hold a lot of weight. It's not really much of a vision. The Premier was talking about putting forward a vision for the next 15 to 20 years. All I see here is a document that will try to hang on or allow this government to hang on to the thing that it craves most, which has been power, that it has had for 43 years. I'm a little disappointed, as I laid out, that some of the overtly partisan remarks were put into this speech, that we had to put our Lieutenant Governor through reading some of that.

I look forward to seeing what actually comes from this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the hon. member to comment particularly on issues dealing with flood mitigation. I understand that it was brought up in the speech. I know that not just High River but Calgary and a community in my own constituency, Sundre, suffered greatly during not just the last flood but previous floods going back in history. The government now has claimed to make it a commitment, but I'm not sure where this is leading to. I was wondering if the member would care to

comment on the government's proposal to deal with flood mitigation and the issues with our watersheds.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I thank the member for the question. I think one thing that we learned this past spring was that we need to do everything that we can to be prepared. It is encouraging to see that the government is taking mitigation very seriously. I think it's something that we need to act on as soon as possible because, as we're all aware, political will to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on flood mitigation will dissipate the further away we get from a natural disaster like what we experienced in the spring of 2013.

I think that it's a good step forward that they struck the task force. They seemed to come up with some interesting ideas around the dry dams on the Elbow and Sheep and other rivers. There's extensive work that's being done in High River already to this day. I think that we're going to see some of this being covered as we go through our supplementary supply estimates through the Municipal Affairs budget.

I think it's critical that this government does work with municipalities and makes sure that they have the funds available to them to properly set up a mitigation plan for their communities, in particular Calgary, where the majority of our businesses downtown were impacted fairly severely. As one of the economic drivers of this province, which is, in turn, the economic driver of our country, I think that protecting downtown Calgary and the areas around it is critical.

There are some very interesting projects that have been floated, Mr. Speaker, particularly the underground tunnel that would go from the Glenmore reservoir flowing through to the Bow River under the 58th Avenue. I guess it's going to go underground. It's a fascinating project. It's a pipe that could be eight metres wide from what I've read. It could take up to, I believe, 650 cubic metres per second, which is a substantial amount of water. It's thinking outside of the box, which is, I think, something that we recognize that we may have to do a very good job of. I hope and pray, as do, I'm sure, all members of this Assembly, that we do not get hit with another disaster of the nature, size, and scope that we did in 2013 before we have the opportunity to get these very important mitigation projects built to their fullest extent.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I do have some more time. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to ask my colleague. I, too, paid very much attention to the throne speech, as we all did, and I paid particular attention to their continued commitment to supporting municipalities. I was looking forward, as the member was, to seeing us maybe getting back to where the MSI was promised to be, as the member has said. In our supply estimates that were handed out just a little while ago, I see that the MSI, the municipal sustainability initiative, has gone from a whopping \$846 million with a huge increase to \$847,000,570. That's not much of a commitment, so I'd like to get the member to respond to that.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you referring to the supplementary supply estimates for the finalization of the current year, or are you referring to the comments from the throne speech?

Mr. Rowe: Supplementary supply estimates.

The Deputy Speaker: The member might attempt, but I think you're mixing two items there.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would concur with your assessment. I believe that what we'll see on Thursday will be a massive injection of cash into the MSI fund, and that will be for Budget 2014 moving forward as opposed to supplementary supply estimates for this current fiscal year. But it is a good question and something that we should be watching very closely.

As noted earlier – and one knows that I like repeating phrases like this – it was a broken promise by this Premier. Hopefully, this government will do what it can to rectify that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I have a very short list of people that wish to speak. My next speaker will be the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals I'm pleased to reply to the Speech from the Throne for the Second Session of the 28th Alberta Legislature. The Alberta Liberals will work hard to build a strong economy and a strong society. Alberta Liberals want a fiscally prudent, socially progressive, and environmentally responsible government at home and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate to live in the best province in the best country in the world, where the people cherish democracy, personal freedoms, and the rule of law. As Albertans we are blessed with an abundance of natural resources which are in high demand across the country and the world. Our greatest resource, however, lies in the character, the work ethic, and the potential of our people. Hard-working, industrious men and women have built this great province, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. They have braved many challenges, and they have made this a better place for their families, a more welcoming place for newcomers, and a better world for us. Alberta is a place where hope meets opportunity. Many continue to arrive here every day from across the world to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a good economy, and it thrives in spite of government policies, not because of them. We do well as a province despite our grossly unfair flat-tax scheme that sees multi-millionaires pay the same small percentage as a single mother earning minimum wage. Nor is it due to the poor environmental record this government has created for Alberta, a poor record which is making it very difficult for us to get the needed pipelines built so that we can get our product to market. Instead of solutions, this government offers nothing more than foot-dragging and exercises in political spending.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta succeeds because of the vast natural wealth with which our province is blessed and because of the hard work of everyday Albertans working to make a better life for themselves and their children. This government will see all of their prosperity squandered in one generation with current policies, saving peanuts while other jurisdictions by comparison have put away hundreds of billions of dollars in less time. It would launch a direct assault on the people who built this province by bullying them into contract negotiations and denying them fair compensation.

It would cram our children into overcrowded classrooms while promising to build badly needed new schools, many of which will

be nothing more than portable trailers loosely thrown together in a field. It would saddle our young people with crushing student debt and limit their educational choices.

It would see people languish in hospitals because this government neglects to invest in nonprofit, community-based home care and long-term care, as a result wasting hundreds of millions of dollars and leading to cancelled surgeries and lost workplace productivity, all while subsidizing private companies, many that are outside of this province, that can neither reduce the costs of health care nor deliver the high quality Albertans expect and deserve.

It would treat local governments, who are directly responsible to the vast majority of Albertans, as wards of the state or administrative puppets serving the interests of the provincial government instead of the residents who elected them. No, Mr. Speaker, this is not the way to build a strong Alberta economy.

4:40

If there is one thing that Albertans have seen clearly over the last couple of years, it's that the Conservatives' fiscal management – or should I say mismanagement? – leaves much to be desired. To say that it has expensive tastes would be a massive understatement, as evidenced by first-class flights and very expensive hotels. I have reminded the government at every opportunity that we are here to serve the public, not to be served by the public. We need to find out where all of our money is going, end the government's wasteful spending, and ensure that we're getting the best value for taxpayer dollars so that we can provide Albertans with the level and quality of services that they pay for and deserve and desperately need at a time of growth.

This year's throne speech, with all of its chest thumping about the economy, raises one very important question that Alberta Liberals want the government to answer. Mr. Speaker, what good is a strong economy if you don't have a strong society? The words in this Speech from the Throne are not backed up by the brutal cuts in the 2013 budget. The effects of the cuts will be felt by Albertans for years to come. This is a time to build this province, but the budget from last year will hurt the province for the years ahead and hurt our ability to build a strong economy and a strong society.

In fact, one thing I saw missing in the Speech from the Throne – well, a couple of things. You know, the Premier didn't even mention ending child poverty. She made a commitment to end child poverty in five years. We're year 3 into that commitment. Also, the Premier completely omitted the social policy framework, the very policies that will help build a strong society and improve our economy for the future, an economy of innovation, research and development, and technology.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to do something a little different here. I believe that the government has many issues. I believe that what we need to do is propose solutions. This is what an Alberta Liberal government would do. The Alberta Liberals support the energy economy. We believe that it's essential that we get our pipelines to tidewater. We believe that it's essential that we get our pipelines going east, west, and south. The way to get our pipelines to tidewater is to rebuild our credibility on the environment. The Alberta Liberals would bring in world-best practices on the environment, independent monitoring of the environment, and strict enforcement of the rules.

President Obama and the Democratic administration in the U.S. expect us to take meaningful action on carbon as do European partners. By putting a real price on carbon and dealing with the environmental issues, we can remove the barriers that impede our ability to get our pipelines to market. Mr. Speaker, the world

wants us to do well in this file. I believe Albertans are ethical, moral, good people, and I believe we are the safest, most reliable source of energy on the planet.

With respect to the economy we also need to cut red tape. Many entrepreneurs have told me that there are too many rules and too much paperwork. In a global marketplace business needs good rules and strong rules. Many in business also say that we need an educated, skilled labour workforce. We have the people, but the people need an education system that meets their needs so that they can meet industry's needs. This is good business, Mr. Speaker.

I believe, also, that when we get our product to tidewater, we as a province and as a country should make an effort to upgrade and refine as much of our product at home, if not in Alberta, at least in our country. The Alberta Liberals would love to see a national energy corridor and a transportation corridor from coast to coast with bidirectional flow of products and people. We need to break down interprovincial trade barriers. We as a country need to work together. I believe that the resources Alberta has been blessed with can benefit the nation more than they are currently benefiting our nation today.

I would like to talk about social policy, Mr. Speaker. One of the major issues for Alberta Liberals is the education system. We would like to ensure that every child in our province and every citizen has a chance to get a world-class education that's affordable, that's accessible, that's of high quality, and that meets the needs of the individual and our society.

Today we have 1,000 fewer teachers and 50,000 more kids in the school system. Over the last four years alone Alberta had one of the highest high school dropout rates in the country, the lowest postsecondary participation rates in the country. The Alberta Liberals would make the largest investment in Alberta history in education, from early childhood to postsecondary.

We need to maintain our schools. We need a massive investment in maintenance of the schools that we currently have. We need to staff our schools appropriately with the right number of teachers, and those teachers need support. We need to ensure that our students are getting the best possible learning experience from their classrooms.

We also do need new schools. Absolutely. The Alberta Liberals will build new schools, not as private-public partnerships but schools as community hubs, schools that would include a cafeteria so children can get breakfast and lunch, schools that will have daycares so working parents who have some kids in school can have affordable world-class daycare, child care, many of them single moms. Mr. Speaker, our schools need to have public health clinics. Let's put not only the school nurse but the nurse practitioner and the whole health care team, the prevention side of the health team, into the schools, what we call wraparound services.

Let's give our teachers the opportunity to teach. Our teachers are being parents and social workers and nurses to many of our children. I believe if we make this investment, it will actually save us money in health care, in the criminal justice system, and in the children and youth services system. An ounce of prevention will save us a lot of money down the pipeline, but more importantly it would improve the lives of our young people and give them the opportunity to do amazing things.

Mr. Speaker, the next billion-dollar idea in Alberta will come from our children. In postsecondary the Alberta Liberals would not only restore the drastic cuts that were made; we would actually make a massive investment into postsecondary education and adopt the recommendations of the Ignite report, one of the largest reports made with the consultation of the teachers and the staff

and the students in postsecondary institutions, to make sure postsecondary education is accessible, affordable, of high quality, transferable, and there's full accountability in the system. Today we have amongst the highest tuition and fees in the country and amongst the lowest postsecondary participation rates in the country. It also is hurting our economy, it's hurting individuals, and it's hurting our community.

The Alberta Liberals will care for our seniors. We will do what is necessary to treat them with dignity and respect. The very people that have built this province and this country will live out their lives with dignity, with world-class home care, nonprofit community-based home care and lodge care, and world-class nonprofit community-based long-term care. Alberta Liberals will bring in a drug plan so that seniors can afford their drugs, unlike the government who wants to bring in a drug plan that's a tax on the sick. If seniors can afford to get their drugs, they will actually stay out of the hospital system. We know this investment in a drug plan will actually improve their lives and save us money in the acute-care health system.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about health care. The Alberta Liberals will fix the health care system. In fact, we will bring back the strongest performance and accountability measures in the country, and we will legislate them. In order to achieve those measures, yes, investing in our seniors and the disabled and the community capacity system is essential. We will make sure that every Albertan has a family doctor. We will invest heavily in our family care clinics or primary care networks. We need to have one type of clinic. They need to be one. We will integrate them into acute care and integrate them into seniors' care and into our school system. We will bring in the most robust health care guarantees in the country.

Health care spending is up 43 per cent since 2007. The population is only up by 15 per cent. If you can't manage health care, you can't govern because if you can't manage health care – that's a \$5 billion increase since 2007 – the province is either going into debt or you're cutting the very services that keep people healthy and out of the health system, services like education and seniors and disabled supports.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals would give our civil servants, the nurses, the teachers, the front-line responders, the support staff, the very heroes who build this province – we would treat them with respect by repealing Bill 45 and Bill 46, which violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Alberta Liberals will not take away their pensions like the Conservative government wants to do. The Alberta Liberals will ensure that the seniors who will retire shortly will not live a life in poverty.

I'd like to talk about infrastructure. Infrastructure is essential for an economy. We need to build the roads and the bridges and the buildings necessary to grow our economy and to serve our society. The Alberta Liberals will invest heavily in LRT in Edmonton and Calgary and green transit to ensure that Albertans have affordable and green transportation. The Alberta Liberals will ensure that our municipal leaders are given the respect, revenue, and shared responsibility that they need to build our cities and towns.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans shouldn't look to the Conservative throne speech for any real solutions to a decades-old problem. There simply aren't any. The throne speech is a eulogy for an intellectually dead and very tired political dynasty. It was a force for good decades ago.

There's only one thing from this speech that growing numbers of Albertans can agree on. It's time for new management, and it's time for change. Not change for change's sake. We don't need to

look to the radical right or the far left, that will hurt the economy. We need smart and thoughtful management. Alberta needs a government that knows how to provide both a strong economy and a strong society. An Alberta Liberal government will handle that task. We will get Albertans . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member had talked about budgetary measures. I'm just wondering how the Alberta Liberal Party would balance the books. Apparently, this government can't.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member. This is one of the most fundamental questions. The economy: this is as good as it gets. The best employment rates in the country, amongst the highest incomes. Oil is as high as it gets. Gas is at \$5. Why are we going into debt? Why aren't Albertans getting the services? Well, I'll tell you why. The Alberta Liberals believe that good ideas should not be rejected because of the source. In fact, the Wildrose has put out some good ideas on how to cut some wasteful spending. I believe all of our political parties can agree on that because that just makes sense. It does make sense, and I give them the credit because it's due.

The Alberta Liberals would implement many of those wasteful spending cuts, and we would go beyond that. In health care alone, better management in health care. Imagine, just a 10 per cent efficiency in health care could achieve possibly a billion dollar savings and better health care. The Alberta Liberals will better manage health care. We're the only party with the solutions to fixing the health care system. That's on the spending side.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, on the revenue side we talked about that we do need to increase our revenue. The way to increase the revenue is to deal with the environmental barriers and get our pipelines to tidewater. There'll be more money coming in for corporations and businesses and companies and government coffers. That just makes sense. It's good economic policy, actually.

The plants: the royalty holidays are over, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of money coming in. There's a lot of money that's coming in, but we also believe we need to go back to a progressive income tax. A progressive income tax would actually be a tax cut for the majority of Albertans. We did some research and found that the progressive tax that Premier Lougheed brought in was 44 per cent of the federal tax bracket. In fact, the taxes used to be 7.48 per cent for low-income Albertans and 12.76 per cent for high-income Albertans. So the flat tax that was brought in in 2001 was actually a tax increase for the vast majority of Albertans.

The Alberta Liberals understand that if you cut taxes for working families and cut their school fees and cut their bills that they've got to pay for electricity and gas, when working families have money in their pocket, they have money to spend on a better house, a better car; they eat out. We believe that's actually good for the economy. With the policies of trickle-down economics, where you give a few billionaires a whole bunch of money, well, all that trickles down is burdens.

The Alberta Liberals are the party that believes that if you invest in middle-income and low-income working Albertans, if you invest in education, health, literacy, and make sure that they've got money in their pockets, we'll have a stronger economy and a stronger society. And if we do that, we will also save money in the criminal justice system, in the children and youth services

system, the health care system. These systems are the symptom of a lack of investment upstream. That's exactly how we will not only balance the budget, but we will actually save money and get our citizens the services they need: a good education system, a good health care system, good public infrastructure. Not only a good social policy, they're actually economic enablers for the economy of the future.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for asking me a very complex question to a very complex problem. I believe that if we all as legislators work together, we could all build a strong economy and a strong society and a better Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw on 29(2)(a). You've got about a minute.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, sir. Thank you. I appreciate it, Mr. Speaker. Hon. member, you acknowledged that men and women built this province; however, reading this document, you would almost assume that the PC government built this province. Would you care to comment on that?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, hon. member. I didn't want to be too negative about the Speech from the Throne, but it did look like more of an election document. It was lacking in humility. Really, it's regular, everyday, hard-working people, the heroes, who have built this wonderful province, not a political government. It's our seniors who built this province. In fact, many of them who built this province never voted for this current government. They built it before this government ever came into existence. It's the moms and dads right now who work hard every day who are building this province, and our children will continue to build this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next speaker. I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely thrilled to stand up and make some comments in regard to the Speech from the Throne. I've been here a long time. Honestly, I hate saying that because it dates you. You know, you think, "Oh, my gosh," when you start reflecting. The last time I stood up and spoke to a Speech from the Throne was shortly after I got elected in 1993, and I can tell you that that's 21 years ago.

It's been interesting to watch what has happened over all those years and all the different speeches from the throne that have taken place since then. It always used to excite me, listening to it. I thought it was a great ceremony, and I listened intently to what the LG had to say. I've been around long enough to know that this is a back-and-forth sort of negotiation, that this is what the government wants in the speech, this is what the LG is prepared to say, and at the end of the day, after much back and forth, it gets approved.

I was really kind of looking forward to hearing what was going to be said in the Speech from the Throne yesterday because, if you recall, we haven't had a Speech from the Throne for the last two years. You know, that's unusual. I haven't gone to any debating to find out exactly if there has been a period where there wasn't a Speech from the Throne for two years. It's a speech that kind of sets the agenda for where the government is going, what they are doing, a time to tell Albertans what the agenda is.

It was interesting for me to listen and see where this government is going in regard to what they're going to do on behalf of Albertans. You know, words are interesting. I find that sometimes you have to sit back and put the 24-hour rule in place and take some time to read it. Throughout this whole speech I haven't identified anywhere – and one of the members can stand up and correct me – where it talks about the openness, the accountability, and the transparency that this Premier alluded to when she first got elected. You know, they talk about working hard and innovative ideas.

5:00

The other thing that's missing in here that I have found interesting: nowhere does it even mention telling the truth to Albertans. I know that's a word that we have to be very cautious on.

I've had the privilege, if I can say this, of being on both sides of the House, and I say that in all honesty and all fairness. I was elected in 1993 as a PC, had what I consider probably the most privileged and honoured time working under the Premier at the time, Premier Klein, and have a deep, deep, deep amount of respect for the man and learned so much under his leadership and with some of the colleagues that were with me at the time. In fact, I had so many mentors over there at that particular time that I sometimes wonder if when I first got elected in 1993, they all of a sudden thought that they had a Siamese twin because to me I was beside them right from the beginning, sucking up as much energy and as much knowledge as I could from them because I had, as I indicated, a great deal of respect.

What I found under that leadership, under that particular Premier, Mr. Speaker: it was rocky. In 1993 that particular Premier had an agenda, and he said that he was going to balance the books. I know there are a couple of my colleagues over there that were with me in 1993. Calgary-Cross comes to mind. Lesser Slave Lake was there. It was an interesting period of time. We've heard Premier Klein talk about how there wasn't a protest that we didn't go through every day. I remember coming home one day to my husband and breaking down and saying: "You know, nobody likes me. Everybody hates me." He said: "Yeah. You're going to go to the garden and eat worms next, I'm sure." But this was the agenda that was focused on, and this was what we were going to do.

What I find so interesting about the building Alberta plan – and I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I hate that slogan out of all the slogans I've seen this government do since 1993. They talk about their building Alberta plan, and my colleague earlier today talked about his school, and we see these multiple big signs – I see all these big signs – yet to this day I haven't seen a shovel. If anybody could even show me a shovel. I appreciate the fact that we're promising . . . [interjections] I hear some words over there. I think it's the Solicitor General.

The Deputy Speaker: You've got the floor, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know, he still hasn't learned in this Legislature that I'm hearing impaired, so all I get is a muffled noise from him, and that's probably . . .

Mr. Hale: You're lucky.

Mrs. Forsyth: Lucky that I can't hear him. You know, I find it interesting that the Solicitor General and the Associate Minister of Public Safety, who are supposed to be representing the people of Alberta, can't sit quietly and listen to some of the comments I

have to make. [interjection] He's going again, and fortunately I can't hear him.

We talk about their two-year mandate, and then they've delivered this government's first Speech from the Throne. It contained the following message.

Over the next four years, this government will . . . deliver and fulfill a clear, focused, target-driven mandate. Albertans will know where the province is headed and how progress is being made, because this is a government that will stay true to its promises.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've given up counting how many promises have been broken by this particular government, and I'm sure we would have no problem tabling how many broken promises this particular government has. You know, I can give you a ton of examples under health care. I can give you a ton of examples as simple as promises that the Premier made prior to when she was running for the leadership about all the things that she was going to do, and it's just been one broken promise after another broken promise.

You know, as Health critic for the last four years I don't even know what to say on the health care file other than the fact that the health care professionals in this province truly, truly, truly are the ones that need to get a standing ovation day in and day out for the jobs that they do under very difficult circumstances. I hear daily about when people get into the system and how well they do and how professional the people in the system are.

What we continuously hear about are the cancelled surgeries, the wait-lists, the quarterly reports that this government was so adamant they were going to do. Now we're not even getting a quarterly report; we're kind of getting a half sort of a quarterly report, maybe not so much a quarterly report on what they're doing, which I think really is a tragedy, quite frankly. If there was one thing that I did respect about Alberta Health Services, it was the quarterly reports. Even though they were failing on many of their performance measures, at least they put it in black and white, and at least they showed that they were making some progress.

You saw today when we had the people up from Slave Lake on the FCCs that the answers we got back from the minister truly were sad. Albertans, quite frankly, are onto his answers when he answers things in the Legislature. The amount of FOIPs that we're getting, and the amount of brown envelopes that we're getting. I tweeted a little while ago that it makes my day when I hear from a leak or I get a brown envelope or I get a FOIP because none of them lie. Quite frankly, when you have it in black and white – I think it's 86 pages of a FOIP that I'm trying to go through right now just on one and then another 81 pages on another. You have to go through that, and these kinds of things don't lie. The dickering that we have to go through back and forth just to get these FOIPs released, and then they have them all blacked out because there's something within the FOIP legislation. You know, it's some sort of confidentiality under 23(1). I can appreciate that.

I guess for me and on behalf of Albertans if the government could talk about when they're going to build these. The Minister of Infrastructure answered the question today in regard to the school, I think, in Blackfalds that my colleague asked him about. I'm not a builder. I'm not a plumber. I don't know other than that I'm in major renos at this particular time and I see the problems and the delays that I have and others have in regard to when they're doing major renovations. I don't know how the heck he's going to do, I think, 50 new schools and 70 renovations in two years. I'm not a rocket scientist. I just don't know how these are going to be built. The Minister of Infrastructure, no question, is going to be out there with his own shovel, making sure that this stuff gets done, because otherwise it's not going to get done. Are

all of us . . . [interjections] Oh, he's saying something also. You know, I've known him for a long time, when he was an alderman and when he was running for mayor, so I'm sure that he will get that school done if he has to even use his own shovel and will provide us with information.

The other thing that I find fascinating in this is that they talk about that "375 programs have already been reviewed under Results-Based Budgeting, with the third phase set to begin and be fully completed this year." I would imagine that falls under the Minister of Finance. I stand to be corrected on that, but I do think that it was his initiative or the Premier's. I would love to know and to get some details about his results-based budgeting. I can tell you as the critic for Health that I haven't seen any results-based budgeting in Health. In fact, we're having some very interesting conversations back and forth with AHS in regard to some numbers that they've recently put out that they can't seem to find. We'll be bringing that to the minister's attention to find out just exactly how they're going to go back and rationalize that to Albertans.

The family care clinics. This is one of my favourites. "Your government is already working with communities across Alberta to develop the first wave of Family Care Clinics that are open later and provide health care closer to home. More FCCs will follow." Well, that's an interesting statement. It doesn't say if it's going to be the 140 that they promised. More FCCs to follow. This is in the Speech from the Throne. More FCCs to follow. Just incredible.

5:10

They talk about how "this government will invest in better seniors' care, focusing funding on aging-in-place and on innovative new technology that allows patients to recover in their own homes." Well, we don't have to look back on what's happening to the seniors in our province or some of the horrible, horrible things that we've seen. The government doesn't seem to understand that the fact of the matter is that while we appreciate what they're doing in continuing care spaces, we have seniors in this province that need to be in long-term care nursing beds. These particular seniors, many of them, hundreds of them, for that matter, are still tied up in an acute-care facility. We've had people that have spoken out more often than I can imagine, like Dr. Paul Parks, in regard to the need for building some long-term care nursing beds so these seniors can age in place, because they don't fit into a continuing care model.

I saw that with my own mom, who was in a continuing care facility and ended up in the hospital. The doctor that was taking care of her said to me that we needed to sit down and have the family chat, and that's always kind of not so good. He said that my mom would not be able to return to the continuing care facility that she was already in, that she would have to go into a long-term care nursing bed. He didn't think that he would be able to get her into that kind of a facility because there was no room, and the government wasn't building any more long-term care nursing beds.

You know, you hear these stories, Mr. Speaker, but when they hit you personally, you have to make some difficult decisions. The government needs to understand that there have to be long-term care nursing beds.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2). The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. You have been an outstanding advocate for

health care and seniors' care in this province. I'm wondering if you could comment on some things that you would hope to see in this document regarding both health care and seniors' care.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are so many things. I mean, I've briefly touched on them. I think probably one of the most disgusting things that I've seen from this government within the last couple of weeks is how they buried the Wild report, the most anticipated mental health and addictions plan, that this government paid thousands and thousands of dollars for. It's historical. That's how important this report was, and they buried it on February 14 at 4:30 in the afternoon on their website, without any press release or anything, probably a 272-page document on mental health and addictions, which is key to moving people, 1 in 5 people with mental health, 1 in 10 people with addictions. And this government buries it. It's a disservice to the mentally ill in this province and a disservice to people with addictions in this province. They should be embarrassed about doing that, quite frankly.

I can tell you about some of the things in regard to what's happening with our seniors. Health care. I can honestly stand up every day for every question in question period and probably go 365 days in regard to asking the minister and the government health care questions, and they continually tend to BS their way around some of the answers. You know, it really is embarrassing.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be interested in asking the hon. member. I know she was directly affected by the flood of 2013. With the comments in the speech dealing with the whole flood and flood mitigation, I wonder if the hon. member would make some sort of comment on what her expectations were. Or did the throne speech meet those expectations?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, we were some of the lucky ones in the floods. We were evacuated on the Thursday night at about 10 o'clock. I had a nice officer at our door, knocking on the door, telling us that we would have to be out of the house in the next hour. We spent most of the time after we were evacuated from the house – my husband and I started off at the drop-in centre, and then we moved out to High River.

This government always seems to want to take the credit for everything, but the problem with taking the credit is that they forget to thank the people who should have had the credit, the thousands of Calgarians and other like-minded Albertans that knew when people were in trouble and went out. We were working with many of my colleagues, including my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. We kind of ended up in the same team, slugging through the mud, carrying stuff out for seniors, and things like that. My colleague from Strathmore-Brooks: for the mom of one of his friends we had a crew out there for days trying to help her out. You know, the government can take the credit, but in retrospect the credit has to go to the absolutely incredible Calgarians and thousands of Albertans that did the job of the government.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Next to speak, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered yesterday by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. There is nothing in that speech that lays out a real vision for this province from this

Progressive Conservative government. It barely talks about improving primary health care. It doesn't address fairness for workers. It forgets altogether the Premier's promise to end child poverty. I want to tell Albertans what the New Democrat vision for Alberta is. This is the Speech from the Throne, were we to be the government, that we would deliver in this House.

Alberta is a great province. It's a province that I'm proud to live in. It's a province fortunate to have great natural resource wealth, but the most important resource in this province, the resource that our prosperity is truly based on, is Albertans themselves.

Albertans have told this government what they want. They want a government that invests in essential services like health care and education. They want to see the government plan for a prosperous future by developing our oil sands carefully and intelligently. Albertans believe in fairness. They believe in protecting the vulnerable, working to end poverty, especially for children, and caring for Albertans with disabilities. They want a government that builds schools and hospitals but ensures that they are properly staffed. But they also want balanced budgets, and they want to see fair, competitive taxation that gives a break to middle-class families while ensuring that the very wealthy in our society pay their share. Those are New Democrat values, too, Mr. Speaker.

There are four pillars that a New Democrat government would depend on: first, to develop a strong fiscal plan to fund the province's needs; second, to create the economic conditions for long-term prosperity that includes everyone; to protect the clean air, water, and land that will sustain Alberta for generations to come; and finally, to deliver the public services that Albertans need and expect.

New Democrats believe that it's past time for us to put our finances on a firm footing. More than 20 per cent of operational spending in Alberta is funded from oil and gas royalty revenues, which are notoriously volatile and which see us at risk of cutting our core services and laying off teachers and nurses every time the price of oil drops. We can do better than that, Mr. Speaker. We must do better than that.

Alberta has a structural problem with revenues. Cuts to corporate and personal income tax for high-income individuals have drastically reduced the revenue we receive and have given a massive tax break to the very wealthy. Moreover, our royalty framework continues to bring in the lowest returns in the world on oil and gas resources. We've lost out on billions and billions of dollars that could have gone to our provincial treasury to fund essential services and to fund savings for the future. While our ability to fund essential services has been negatively impacted, middle-class families have had to pay more than their fair share in taxes.

5:20

A New Democrat government would embrace competitive taxation while ensuring that we have a stable source of revenue to fund the services we need. When the wealthy pay their fair share, Mr. Speaker, we can provide lower taxes for the middle class. Of course, we also know that Albertans want balanced budgets, and we believe that revenue reform is the best way to deliver the services Albertans expect and deserve while balancing the provincial budget.

An Alberta New Democrat government would plan for a thriving, sustainable economy, which includes everyone. It's a prosperous province, Mr. Speaker, and all Albertans need to share in that prosperity. The public-sector employees of this province help us deliver the services that Albertans expect and deserve. Bills 45 and 46 and sudden dramatic changes to pension plans are a poor repayment for the hard-working employees who keep our

province healthy, maintain our roads, and work with vulnerable Albertans. An Alberta New Democrat government would immediately repeal both bills 45 and 46. We would work with unions to negotiate a fair contract for all public-sector employees. A government that fails to reach a fair contract with its workers is, quite simply, a government that has failed to do its job.

Prosperity for Albertans should mean security for Albertans as they age. Albertans need a government that delivers quality of life after retirement, which means a government that protects pensions and works to expand the number of people in the province with access to good pensions. An Alberta New Democrat government would join in the calls for an expanded Canada pension plan, which has been blocked by the government of the province of Alberta, and not continue to block improvements that would dramatically improve the quality of life of retired Albertans.

We would also seek to negotiate fairly and openly with plan members and unions to ensure that public-sector pensions provide guaranteed benefits and a fair, livable retirement for the people who work to make our province great year after year.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's oil sands are an essential part of the economy of this province, and they're the source of much of the prosperity that this province enjoys, but the New Democrats believe we could be doing so much more to build on and to protect our oil sands prosperity. Upgrading more of our resources here in the province would deliver good, long-term jobs for Albertans long into the future.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that our prosperity requires access to more markets than just the United States, but we also know that it's time to do a better job of balancing development with a long-term, value-added strategy and a plan to protect Alberta's air, land, and water.

Mr. Speaker, power prices in this province are far too high. Gaming the system by power corporations has become almost routine. A New Democrat government would reregulate the industry, starting with the residential and small-business electricity rates.

We need to do a better job of protecting our air, land, and water. We need better public transit in our cities, better environmental protection, a strategy to deal with tailings ponds, and real regulation on the use of water, on flaring, and on drilling in urban areas. Monitoring of energy projects must be independent and science based. For too long our energy regulations have simply been a rubber stamp on development projects. The boards are stacked with industry friends and insiders and lack the balance that they need. Citizens, First Nations, and environmental groups are all stakeholders, and they all deserve a seat at the table when we discuss the future development of our resources.

A New Democrat government would focus on developing a world-class renewable energy institute. We would look into the options for Alberta's energy future and develop a future for this province that will be prosperous long after our natural resources run out.

Alberta's New Democrats also share a vision with all Albertans for better public services. Year after year Albertans say that investing in health care, education, and other essential services is their priority. That would be our priority as well. We'd fix Alberta Health Services, and we'd protect and expand public health care.

Mr. Speaker, public health care isn't something just as a talking point. It's been shown over and over again that the best, most cost-effective health care is publicly delivered health care, yet in this province we are too dependent on private delivery and the corporate model for Alberta Health Services, that has created chaos in our health care system. The system is more top heavy and less responsive to the needs of today's Alberta families. While the

professionals who work in our health care system report feeling less supported in the crucial work that they do, spending on administration has increased, and services have not improved. A New Democrat government would abolish Alberta Health Services altogether and bring the governance of the public health system back under the control of the Ministry of Health.

We'd make major investments in health care with a common-sense, targeted, and fully costed plan for the \$1 billion yearly increase in federal health transfers, that Alberta will begin receiving this year, investing in long-term care and home care, reducing prescription drug costs for seniors and low-income Albertans, supporting mental health care, expanding our medical and nursing programs, and protecting public laboratory services in Alberta. We'd continue to invest in community clinics to improve access for families across the province in rural and in urban areas.

Ensuring excellent education and care for our young people from child care to kindergarten through to postsecondary is another area where Albertans expect investment and excellence. Sadly, it's yet another area where years of Conservative failure have damaged the system. Child care in Alberta is far too expensive for ordinary families. We would work to create a child care strategy that ensures that parents living in a province where people already work the most in Canada aren't working still more hours just to pay for high-quality child care.

We'd end the failed P3 model for building schools and return to a traditional financing model to build schools where they're needed. An Alberta New Democrat government would finally do the necessary work with municipalities and school boards to solve overcrowding and to revitalize schools in older communities.

For young people looking for a postsecondary education and training, it's vital that we restore programs at Alberta's colleges, universities, and trade schools. As the province with a post-secondary participation rate that's already the lowest in Canada, Alberta needs a strategy to ensure that our young people are developing the skills and the knowledge they need for a successful, prosperous future. The Alberta New Democrats would strike an affordability task force to work with young Albertans to ensure that postsecondary education is accessible, affordable, and attractive. For a start, we'd put a real freeze on tuition fees and work to deliver a ban on mandatory noninstructional fees as well.

As Alberta's government New Democrats know that we can do better. We can provide the public services that Albertans need and expect. We can give our young people the skills, knowledge, training, and opportunities to be part of the most prosperous workforce in the country. We can strengthen and protect our public health care system. We can balance the budget. We can make things easier for middle-class families. We can ensure that Albertans get the prosperity that we all deserve from the resources that we all own together.

We believe that Alberta is a great province, a province with great natural resource wealth and fabulous people. It's time for those people to have a government that respects what they want, what their families' needs are, and what they're asking for. That's the kind of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, that we can all be proud of.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for your speech there. I was wondering if you could offer some comment on the insinuation that difficult decisions that were made in Budget 2013 are going to put our province on the path to a balanced budget as per what was written in this speech.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you for that question, hon. member. I think that when the government betrays the trust of the people that elected it, their favourite euphemism is to say that we had to make difficult decisions. They only made some kinds of difficult decisions: difficult decisions to cut persons with developmental disabilities, to cut postsecondary education, to break their promise on child poverty, and so on. Those were the difficult choices they did make.

The difficult choices they didn't make were to look at the revenue system that we have in our province and make sure that everybody is paying their fair share. They didn't make a decision to look at the royalty regime that we have in this province, and they didn't make a decision to cut wasteful government programs that are subsidies to big business; for instance, the carbon capture and storage program. Those are the decisions they didn't make. The decisions that were made I think will do very little to put us back on a firm footing financially.

5:30

I know that the government is not willing to examine the taxation system in our province. They're not willing to reverse corporate tax cuts or tax cuts for the wealthiest of Albertans, so they depend more than ever on volatile royalty revenue, which is a roller coaster. We even had the Minister of Finance use that term the other day. We have to get off that roller coaster. We can't be laying off nurses and teachers every time the price of oil goes down. But that's the kind of situation we're in.

Now there are additional government revenues – we heard that from the Finance minister – but he says that they're not going to invest in more spending for the social programs that they've cut. Instead, they want to rebuild the fund so that they can go through it all again. So the question really is: will we get out of the cut-and-add, cut-and-add, debt, pay-down-debt, more debt, pay-down-debt kind of roller coaster, that kind of unstable financial planning for the province under this Progressive Conservative government? No, I don't think we will. I think that it's going to take a government that's prepared to put our financial position on a firm footing and deal with the structural fiscal imbalance that exists in this province so that we can have balanced budgets and the kinds of programs that Albertans expect without having them cut every other year.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a response to the throne speech, there's something that I was quite disappointed in, particularly when we talked about the agreements between Alberta and B.C. to get our oil and gas to the coast. It's significant because it has to do with the environment. The speech had an absence of any commitment to address environmental issues, and that's significant because all of our abilities to access markets are being hindered by our record or the perception of the lack of a record of dealing with the environment. Without addressing this, we're basically not just handicapping the ability to help our industries access the market, but we are also doing a disservice to the average Albertan, who desperately wants clean water, clean air, and clean land, without a doubt.

Universally, across this province, people do want a clean environment. They want a good environmental policy. They want a good environmental record. What we have is a situation where in the last year we have experienced the largest coal mine disaster

ever to leach into a riverway in Canadian history. That's the Obed coal mine disaster. Currently there are no changes to policy. There is no mention of what we would do differently to prevent this from happening again. We also still have the issue of the condition of the Athabasca River. As a result, is there going to be any mitigation? We're dealing with heavy metals that do not dissolve. Unfortunately, the minister previously had said that they would dissipate or dissolve in the river, but that's not true. That's not science based.

We have significant issues, and these issues plague us as a province. It plagues our economy if we're not able to address them to the satisfaction of the everyday Albertan, if we're not able to address these issues to the satisfaction of the marketplaces that we're trying to access. When this government looks at some of the issues that are hindering the building of our pipelines, all those hindrances are based on environmental concerns. If you look at Nebraska dealing with the XL pipeline, it's all about water. It's all about the pipeline going through an aquifer. If you look at the Gateway, going to the B.C. coast, First Nations are concerned about the river crossings and are concerned about the safety and the likelihood of having leaks.

Now, what's missing in the formula is that our industries have the technology, and they have the qualified people. We have the ability to actually do something to set the record straight, but we're not doing it. Hence, what we have is, in essence, hollow words. The words are good. The intentions may be well meaning, but if they're not followed by action, then everything is for naught. It's the action that actually makes that commitment a reality, and what we're not seeing here is action. Clearly, this is a problem for this government. It's a problem for all Albertans.

I want to give a microexample of the words not following the actions. The little community of Bentley, Alberta, which is in my constituency, has a highway 12 bypass. This government likes to take credit for things that it doesn't do. Unfortunately, now it's going to get credit for doing something terribly wrong. They stuck up a big building Alberta sign, which is wonderful. We really like the building Alberta signs. It helps the sign companies stay in business. It contributes to our economy. Unfortunately, they've got a big building Alberta sign where the government decided to start the construction of a bypass and then cancelled it. They cancelled it after it broke ground, allowed the runoff to violate our environmental laws, and there it lies in an absolute mess.

The community of Bentley is going to celebrate their centennial this summer, and we only have a matter of a few months to do one of two things, either complete the project – I don't expect the minister to be able to get it done. Hopefully, he would stand up and say that he can guarantee that he'll get it done, but I'm not expecting that. What I am expecting is for him to address the issue and say: we're at least going to clean it up so that when you hold your centennial, it doesn't look like we've trashed your community. That's not an unreasonable request from this community. Here we have the whole premise of building Alberta, but what we don't really have is the follow-through and the actions of actually building.

We're seeing the same with schools. I for one would desperately like the government to follow through and actually do what it says it's going to do. Unfortunately, even the builders who are dealing in this industry, who are dealing with the government, are all saying in unison that they will not have these schools built on time, not on the time frame this government has said. Now, I would like these builders to be wrong. I would like this government to be right. But what I can't see, even from this speech, is where there's a connection from what the government is saying through to a fruition, where they will actually accomplish

their goal. That's not visible, but what is visible is that the government is going to be consistent in what it's been doing, which is not getting the job done. Clearly, we have a disconnect between this speech and the reality of what's happening out in Alberta.

Now, another example is seniors' care. In seniors' care we've got some significant issues, but I'll just deal with a couple of issues that I'm quite familiar with in my constituency, and those have to do with the long-term care out in Rocky Mountain House. We have a situation where we have a new seniors' facility, that the ribbon was cut on last year. All well and good. That started under Ed Stelmach, and we saw the follow-through. It took years to do it.

But what happened in the process is that we've cut funding for the operation of our long-term care in that facility, where those front-line workers cannot meet the commitment of Alberta Health, which is to provide even two baths a week. They can't do it. They're not staffed and they're not funded to get it done. The problem is that more and more staff are being cut back. Now we have seniors who are in critical need of getting their meals to them on time. A lot of these meals now have to be reheated in a microwave because they sat too long, and they got cold. Anyone here who knows anything about eating out or eating anywhere knows that if you have to continually reheat food, it takes away from the quality. So they get a lesser quality product. They get a lesser quality meal.

What's happening here – and to a T every one of the front-line health care workers in this long-term care facility in Rocky Mountain House will testify that this now is an extreme example, and it's a critical situation, where proper care is not being delivered. It's not for wanting to deliver the care; it's just that the resources are no longer there in that operation to provide that care. The cutbacks have been too great. We have an imbalance in the system. I wish Rocky Mountain House was the only place, but it's not. We're seeing it elsewhere, in other places in the province, and this is a real issue that affects us.

5:40

I just want to come back to the issue of dealing with the environment because it's something that's been haunting the enforcement on environmental issues. It's woefully lacking. I used this example once in the House. I'll use it again. Unfortunately, I'll probably use it multiple times because it has not been resolved. Anyone can understand that when there's a question about environmental damage, you want an adjudicator. You want to determine: what was the damage? What was the extent of the damage? Who was responsible for the damage? I think we all understand that type of process. We want a fair and reliable process that gives the public confidence that justice can be served.

In the case of the Bilozer family we have an issue where none of those requisites are in question. Imperial Oil was found guilty. Imperial Oil admitted it. Alberta Environment has issued multiple – multiple – enforcement orders in the last 20 years, yet nothing has been done to clean up this quarter section belonging to this family. That is just absolutely unreasonable, that you could go to that length and still not have the ability as an organization – this would be Alberta Environment or in the case now of the Alberta Energy Regulator. They cannot just make this company do what they said it should have done 15, 20 years ago, do what they said it should have done 10 years ago or even five years ago. We still have not cleaned up the damage, the environmental damage.

Again, I wish this was the one example, a one-off example, that we could just isolate. Unfortunately, it's becoming the norm for the average property owner in Alberta who has suffered environmental damage. That should not be the case. Again, I

understand if that's in question – what the damage is, who's responsible, to what extent the damage is – everybody understands that, but when those questions are answered and enforcement orders are issued, there should never ever be hesitation or delay in the execution of an enforcement order because that's when people lose confidence that we're doing the right job to protect the environment.

Another item that the throne speech focused on was the whole issue of the MSI and the hope that some expressed that there would be a lot of money – and I mean a lot of money – focused on the MSI going forward. If that amount is measured by the smile on the minister's face, I know it'll be a lot of money, and it should cover all those cuts that took place, going way back, in infrastructure building and at least get us on the path of making up that infrastructure deficit. One of the real criteria that keeps many of the municipal councillors, the municipal mayors up at night is: "What's going to happen here? How is it going to affect me short term? How is it going to affect me long term to build infrastructure for my community?" Again, that's universal right across both the AUMA and the AAMD and C.

Infrastructure is critical to the growth of any community, and I don't think anyone here would argue differently. In order to encourage economic growth, you have to have that in place. Without that, it makes it extremely difficult to grow communities. This is a huge issue. Although the throne speech mentioned it, what I would have liked to have seen is a larger commitment so that when this budget rolls out, these mayors, these councillors, the reeves, and these various municipalities would have the anticipation that they have good things to come because there's going to be long-term, steady funding to meet their needs.

Some of these communities are desperate in the sense that the infrastructure has been lagging for so long. Everyone knows there are pressures on all our communities. They differ from community to community, but I think right across Alberta there are pressures on every community to get their infrastructure caught up with the rate of growth in this province, and we're lagging. I think the minister admits we're lagging. We need a plan and a long-term plan on how we're going to get there.

That takes me to flood mitigation. I know that ministers have met with the community of Sundre. I want to thank them for taking that opportunity. Like High River, Sundre is one of those critical communities that faces imminent threat from the flood potential of spring, just barely a few months away. Now, we have studied the river out there to death. I mean, if you look at the studies that go back 20, 30, 40 years, we've got enough studies that we could build a dam with the paperwork we produced, but the fact is that we've not done anything substantive to mitigate the flood.

Now, you don't have to be an expert to realize that it takes action. In the long term there might be the realization that water storage in the form of a dam is one opportunity or one measure that we could take to mitigate and manage that water system, mitigate the floods but also to manage that water system to prevent future floods and also to provide a recreational area or water as needed during those arid times. That makes sense. But in the short term we need . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his comments on the throne speech. I know he has a lot to say about the environmental side of things, but I'm

wondering if he could comment perhaps on the number of times, as reflected in this document, that the government maintains that it is keeping its promises.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't get to mention a lot of things, but I do want to talk about these promises. There's a promise in here by the government to diversify its energy mix, both alternative and renewable energy frameworks, to empower consumers. This is one of those comments that is hollow in this document when you contrast that to this government's actions. The Alberta Utilities Commission just recently cancelled, based on an interpretation of its regulations, a number of private contracts and put out of business a number of solar companies that were viable, that were in business, and it really shook the industry. How do you get a government which says, "This is what we want to do, empower customers' choice," yet the agency that it created, the Alberta Utilities Commission, which it put so much faith in, cancels a number of private contracts without even consulting these people and puts these businesses right out?

What I want to follow up on also is this idea of the Alberta Utilities Commission being the adjudicator of what is going on in the industry right now, which is the price-fixing of our wholesale market. The former Minister of Energy said last May, in reference to this price-fixing, "The hon. member is trying to frighten people with evidence that is unconnected to what people pay for electricity." Unfortunately, that's not true. What people pay for electricity has everything to do with the bottom line on the bill.

When you get a company like TransAlta manipulating electricity prices, that reflects on all those ancillary costs, all those extra costs that are added onto the bill beyond the price of electricity. It's a rigged system against the consumers. These big generators get to charge consumers for the loss of electricity, but they also get to charge consumers for the building of transmission lines, which is free to these big generators. So consumers pay for electricity that they never receive. In doing so, the system is set up so that these companies are allowed to do this. Those are the rules that the Legislature has set up with the Alberta Utilities Commission.

5:50

So how will this commission act as an adjudicator? Most jurisdictions don't have the commissions do that in issues of price-

fixing. Most jurisdictions have the Market Surveillance Administrator as the adjudicator, as the watchdog, as the agency that issues the penalty. Then if the companies or the individuals don't like that, they have the ability to go to the appeals court.

We don't have that. We've got this little buffer in between. Right now TransAlta is asking for an in camera hearing so the public doesn't have access. I have to tell you that we're going to be watching this closely. If you look at the rules of the Alberta Utilities Commission, they favour the industry to get an in camera hearing. That's how they're set up. I'll be really interested to see if the commission has the ability not to provide that in camera hearing.

That's a sad state of affairs when you look at how we want to protect our consumers, because in the end it's not just Alberta's economy that's being hurt by this gaming. It really hurts, and it makes our seniors suffer, particularly those seniors on fixed income. It really penalizes those people that are on limited income and lower income families. It forces them to make choices.

When you take a look at what's been happening, TransAlta was found guilty of manipulating the California market. They were named in all those allegations, and they were found guilty by the FERC during that Enron scandal back in 2000-2001. They have been found guilty in Alberta now and charged multiple times. So where is the incentive not to do this? Oh, by the way, anyone who knows this industry – one company can't do it alone. They need help to manipulate the prices. How many times have they gotten away that we've not caught them? We know how many times we've caught them.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if we could call it 6 o'clock, and I'll postpone my remarks until I have the full 15 minutes.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the advice of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View we'll call it 6 o'clock and reconvene at 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, March 4, 2014

Issue 3e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned March 4]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you wish to speak?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I would. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the throne speech, which I, of course, listened to and read again yesterday. In Edmonton-Calder people are not interested in just words. They're not interested in rhetoric. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Edmonton-Calder has the floor, please. Thank you.

Proceed, member.

Mr. Eggen: People in Calder want action on making life affordable for themselves and for their families. I have a clear and very concise message for this PC government, that is the consensus of the vast majority of people in my constituency in Edmonton and of the rest of this province, too. The message is simple, and it's this. When you keep on breaking promises, people stop believing you. This government promised the moon in order to get elected and proceeded to dismantle each promise after the election. If you keep on breaking promises, Mr. Speaker, people end up stopping believing you.

I found it here again in the throne speech as if somehow an echo or rubbing salts in the same wound that caused so much trouble before. The quote is here, "holding spending below population and inflation growth," from page 10 of the throne speech. This simple directive effectively undermines the budget from last year and, I fear, this coming year as well.

Last year, with similar cuts to spending, broken promises were stacked up like cordwood. The five-year plan to eliminate child poverty has not even been dignified with a mention. Full-day kindergarten has been backtracked considerably, and it is very unclear as to its future. Increasing funding to postsecondary schools: well, we certainly saw a hole blown right through the middle of that one, Mr. Speaker, with significant cuts. I was just speaking at the University of Alberta this evening, and those cuts are real and significant and long-lasting. Delivering a balanced budget by 2013 with no new taxes and no service cuts: this is right from the PC campaign platform. Well, Mr. Speaker, at least I can

give it enough credit to say that if you're going to dish out this kind of thing, you might as well make it a whopper.

Albertans are looking for practical solutions that are actually delivered, that will make life more affordable for themselves and for their families. New Democrats went on an extensive prebudget tour like we do every year to listen to people and carefully document what is being said. The results are strikingly similar almost everywhere, with some local variation, of course. I say let's build a throne speech and a budget that addresses these concrete issues that we heard loud and clear in each corner of this province.

In no particular order, Mr. Speaker, the first one that comes to mind is utility rates. Albertans are paying some of the highest rates for electricity in Canada. As we saw with events in these past few days, there is a lot of confusion and, I would say, trouble associated with the same big five power producers controlling the market like they have done before deregulation. Deregulation has only served to push us into a much narrower channel for how we produce electricity in this province and has made it difficult for us to diversify and to make electricity bills more affordable for Albertans. There's a simple solution. It's a solution that's been used right across North America, and we are the outliers on this one. Simple, basic regulation of our utility rates in this province would make life a whole lot more affordable and a whole lot more conducive to small- and medium-sized business to actually build and prosper and diversify our economy here in the province of Alberta.

I was struck right across this province, from Grande Prairie down to Medicine Hat and Lethbridge, with how fast the rental rates are going up for accommodation in this province. Certainly, we would like to see more production of units for people to live in. We're having the largest immigration of population of anywhere in Canada, and quite frankly at this juncture, with rates going up between 6 and 8 to even 11 per cent in places like Red Deer, we need some rental regulation in place, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the workers that we need to drive our economy have a place that they can afford to live in. If you're spending more of your money on rent than you can afford, every other aspect of a family's life starts to fall apart. You have less money available for education for the kids, you have less money to buy good quality food, for transportation, and so forth.

I think, again, that with our economy being so hot, with rental rates going up so quickly, the time has come that we put some regulation in place for our rental markets. It doesn't have to be there all the time, but I think that at this moment Albertans would appreciate a break on skyrocketing rents in this province.

Again, the minimum wage issue has come up as we travelled around the province, and there has always been lots of misinformation around this. Yes, many people are not just earning the minimum wage, but with the lowest minimum wage in Canada here in the province of Alberta, this casts a negative shadow on the wages for service industry people that are earning a little tiny bit more here and there right across the province. Certainly, it's an expensive place to live out there. We all know that. The idea of not having a living wage for someone who is working full-time, I think, is not just unconscionable, but it defies logical thinking as well. Businesses are capable of paying higher wages. They need that regulation to ensure that the minimum wage is put up to a living level and everybody must abide by that.

This whole idea that service jobs are just something for pin money or for kids who live at home: well, you know, I don't think so. Lots of people end up having to have two or three jobs at low

wages in order to pay for themselves and for their families to get by here in this province. I don't like it. I don't think it's good business. I don't think it's equitable, nor is it just. That is something that we could do here in the spring session, raise the minimum wage and allow those benefits to pass through wage earners right up to differing scales along the economy.

The whole issue around pensions, again, is a very, very sensitive issue. It's not just a question of people being able to save for their future for when they do retire, but it's a question of the security that goes along with having a pension that you know is going to be somewhat affordable or something that you could live on in the future. The idea of disregarding out of hand participating in a national increase in pension contributions and building and strengthening the Canada pension plan, I think, again, is a mistake that we need to reconsider during the spring session. It's a way by which we can supplement other pension incomes that people might be building towards, and it's a way by which we can provide that security, that people are just not having here now.

We know that the public-sector pension issue has been very hotly contested in these last few weeks and months, and certainly it's something that all Albertans would like to see addressed in an equitable way. When we had more than 2,000 people at Churchill Square in Edmonton on Sunday in minus 35 degrees Celsius, it struck me and I think it should strike everyone in this room that these are not just public-sector workers who are making this plea and protesting the changes to pensions, but it's anyone who knows that we set the precedent for what happens with public-sector pensions, and that can certainly have a direct effect on everyone's pensions and security for the future.

Postsecondary access is something that I'm seeing and hearing from people, and the statistics bear it out as well. We have fewer of our young high school graduates going to postsecondary education, and part of the reason is that it's just not affordable. For many middle-income people in this province with families and all the other pressures of a high cost of living, more people are making that choice to not go to postsecondary school. That's a tragedy that has a slow burn, Mr. Speaker, because it burns right through a person's career and their lifetime, not having adequate postsecondary education and the right sort of postsecondary education. They have to carry that burden of lower wages and poorer jobs around with them until they finally can make it to college or some other form of postsecondary. It's becoming unaffordable. We have the lowest rate of participation, and it's quite shameful. At the very least it's a waste of our most precious resource, which is young people, and certainly on an individual level, on a moral level, and on an economic level it's just a bad choice to make postsecondary so expensive.

7:40

I'm hearing as well very clearly that we would like to see something to be done to create affordable daycare in this province at this time. People are working two jobs. We have lots of families with two people working in the family in order to make ends meet, but it becomes prohibitive when you have to pay very expensive rates for daycare.

In jurisdictions around the world where daycare has been made much more affordable, such as in our own Quebec in Canada, it has allowed the economy to move ahead and for family incomes to increase, and all sorts of other benefits have come from affordable daycare. We need it here in this province now. We need to regulate that. It needs to be decommodified in some fundamental way, and we have the power to do that here in the Legislature.

Then, of course, finally, there is a whole host of health care issues that Albertans would like to see addressed. I think that we

can do that in this budget coming up, and certainly there would be a universal benefit for all Albertans. We know that seniors' care is becoming much more expensive. We've somehow moved it out of the provincial budget, and so many more people are having to pay for care for seniors with assisted living and so forth. That price, that burden, is often more than families can afford.

As we know, we have an increasingly aging demographic that's moving through our society now. It's not something that we should be worried about because these things come and go. We knew that the baby boom would be passing through our demographic for the last 50 years. It's arrived now, and with planning and with care we can build the public seniors' care that we require for these next number of years.

We saw as well the whole issue around not building more capacity. Because of increased population and the growing economy in our province we're seeing that the pressures on acute care are starting to become more and more of a problem in different cities and towns around the province. We need more of those acute-care beds. We certainly can free them up by building seniors' care that can relieve the pressure on acute-care facilities, but ultimately we need those acute-care spaces in order to have the proper ratio between population and the capacity in our hospitals.

By running our hospitals at such a high capacity now, we overstrain so many aspects of those institutions and the workers that are in those institutions. By running large hospitals, such as the Royal Alex here in Edmonton, at more than 90 per cent, you end up burning out your staff. You end up not being able to provide the care that people need because of strain. Ultimately you end up with reduced health outcomes, especially if you somehow have an extra emergency plopped on top of that, with some sort of outbreak or something like that. Then the whole system is just overstretched and overheated.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As always, it's an honour and a privilege to be able to address this august Assembly and give my comments on the throne speech, which has been the first throne speech we've had in a couple of years, which is the time for the government to lay out its case as to what it's going to do for the Alberta people and how it's going to bring about peace, order, and good government and move the issues of the day forward. In my view, yesterday was not quite a banner day for the government. It didn't seem to me that the throne speech contained its usual zip or pomp and circumstance and the like. It seemed to be almost a recognition that we're halfway done a mandate with no clear sense of where to go or what direction to go in, and it just seems to be in a holding pattern.

Now, maybe that is my reading into it, but it seemed almost more like a speech given at a funeral than it would have actually been a throne speech. I've been to I think four previous throne speeches, maybe five, and there seemed to be a little bit more energy in the room, a little more zip, a little more: "My goodness. We're on top of things. We know the direction forward. We've led the government. We've got a handle on things." I didn't get that sense yesterday in the throne speech. Maybe that was me. Maybe that was just what I felt in this room. I guess here we are. We're essentially two years into the Redford revolution, I think, if that's what it was to be called.

Mr. Denis: Names, names.

Mr. Hehr: The hon. Premier's revolution. My apologies.

It has now been, essentially, two years since an election where we were promised a great deal of change and a great deal of hope. I believe some advertisements were: this is not your daddy's PC Party and the like. I think the Premier even advertised herself as being the second coming of Premier Lougheed. There was lots of hyperbole going around. I think there was a lot of thought amongst many progressives, if I can use that term, that it was the progressive hour of the Progressive Conservatives. But not only them, they were going to become even a bigger tent and become the answer to the middle of what, in my view, good government looks like and what the good government looked like under Peter Lougheed, representing that middle ground.

I think that was the thought of many people who were out there who voted for Ms Redford – oh, I'm out of practice, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize; I will get back in the flow – the hon. Premier, in the last election. In fact, I think many people ran for the hon. Premier because we were getting away from a lot of the stuff that we had done over the course of the past 20 years.

If you look at the election platform, my goodness, that promised a lot of stuff in there that I, frankly, liked. Predictable, sustainable funding. Schools – can you believe that? – in neighbourhoods where children live. My goodness. We hadn't heard of building schools in neighbourhoods where kids lived in 20 years in this province. This is a good thing. There was a commitment to public education that I thought had been absent, a move towards full-day kindergarten, something that other jurisdictions have had for a long time, Mr. Speaker. A real bevy of things that I like and, frankly, the voters would like.

You know, we get two years into a mandate, and many of those promises have just gone up in smoke. It was like: we promised them, but did we really have a commitment to follow through and deliver on those promises? Frankly, I think the government full well could have delivered on those promises, but that would have taken some real heavy lifting and real emphasis on getting out in front of the public and leading, leading Albertans to a better place, a better future, a better direction for us not only now but 50 years from now. Here's where I can try and explain where I think the government of the day made the mistake, and we find ourselves at this junction, which I don't think is really a pleasant place for anyone, much less the government, much less the citizens of this great province, and much less future generations.

7:50

I think that when the platform was put together, it was made with the recognition that our fiscal structure was broken, okay? People have heard me say this before. By fiscal structure I mean our tax code. Our tax code is the lowest, and we're the lowest tax jurisdiction by a country mile.

If we adopted Saskatchewan's tax code, we'd bring in \$11 billion extra, okay? Even if you bring back half of that or even a third of that, you know – let's face it – you can do a lot of stuff. Let's say a third, \$4 billion extra dollars. You, essentially, are able to build schools, roads, and hospitals without going into debt. You'd actually be able to keep kids in school right now or be able to teach kids in a more reasonable state.

I know the Minister of Education is here, and we have 51,000 more kids in classrooms today than we did three years ago with a thousand less teachers. Well, that could have helped. You know, you don't have to go whole hog on this stuff. Progressive income taxes essentially would have covered much, much of that shortfall, okay? Really, for most people it would have actually ended up in a tax cut to your middle class.

There are a whole host of ways of doing this to ensure that the platform could have been delivered if the government of the day chose to get out and lead. You know, I also see that there comes a recognition when government should do what maybe not is in their best interests but what is in the best interests for the province's future. I've heard some people on that side say that we should be statesmen, not politicians. I like that line. I like that sentiment, and there have been governments in this country who have been that, who have put the interests of the people ahead of their own political party.

I note the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is here tonight, and largely, I think, he was part of a government who put the interests of the country ahead of their political interests. I'm talking about the Brian Mulroney Conservatives of 1988 to 1992. I thought they did a lot of things that may have not been popular but may have been necessary, okay? I think they got out and led, and I don't actually even think that some of those changes were what lost the election. Other things happened. They got out and led. I think that at the end of the day I didn't like those decisions they made back in 1988, but looking back, 25 years later, I say: "My goodness. There was a government that went out and did big things, fought big issues, brought a sense of government to the people that I think we look back on as being thankful for, and we don't recognize that at the time."

I think that's what bothers me about the government of the day here in Alberta. They did not put the best interests of this province for the long run at the core of their decision-making. It seems to me that they put their political interests to the forefront. The political calculation was: well, if we do any tax reform, whether it be any move of the magnitude that the Brian Mulroney Conservatives did or even lesser moves on the progressive income tax or corporate income tax side, my goodness, the electorate will just not vote us in, and it will be Wildrose government, and it'll be the end of the dynasty.

Well, six of one, half a dozen of another. We're two years in. The decisions they made, anyway, haven't, in my view, corrected the problem that's out there in our society, and I don't necessarily know if the political calculation was right, okay? Sometimes governments have to put themselves in the position of doing what's best for the people. I think that in that respect this government failed miserably.

But with respect to the throne speech, you know, the government also sees a day where possibly two years from now, four years from now, we are back in a position, say, like we were in 2001, with lots of money, okay? I see that day coming. Everyone sees that day coming. Still, if we haven't learned what happened over here in the last 25 years, that we're not building permanent prosperity, that we're tending to run from crisis to crisis to crisis, and that we have spent all the oil and gas wealth over the course of the last 40 years as soon as it's come in, I don't know if we'll ever learn it. To be honest here, guys, four years from now you probably won't hear speeches like this in the Legislature. People will have moved on because governments can only do things at certain times, and this was the time to actually do this, to right Alberta's course for the future.

We'll go back to the period of 2001, where we will all think that we are building that permanent prosperity, where we'll have these endowments and things like this and thinking that Alberta's going to be permanently wealthy forever, but eventually, because of the massive subsidization of the taxpayer, essentially \$11 billion dollars compared to other provinces, we will not be building that permanent wealth. We will simply be on a permanent cycle where eventually we're going to be broke one day again. That, Mr. Speaker, I believe is inevitable, for I cannot sit here and tell you that our oil sands – although I hope they do pump for 300 years. I

really do. I hope we have that type of prosperity, but to be honest, can I see past 50 years with our oil sands? Maybe. Some people can't see past 30 years, okay? That means, to me, that there's some real risk out there that we could have tried to mitigate against at this time, and we're not going to be able to do it six years from now.

Let's talk to the day-to-day stuff, even, that we're missing despite the fact that we live in this place of alleged wealth, with our economy ticking along, personal incomes up, corporate incomes up, housing sales up, everything up except for government revenues. Really, if any other jurisdiction had our type of economy, would there be an issue with building schools in areas where kids live? Let's look at that specific promise of those 50 new schools built in Alberta. In my view, Mr. Speaker, that's not going to happen. We'll be lucky. We've gone two years into a mandate, and we haven't started building these schools. There are no P3 contracts in place. There's no government funding in place. These schools may be built sometime in and around 2018 if we're lucky. Here's the real rub. By the time all of those schools are built in 2018, we will have had more children move into the province of Alberta. That makes the crowding at our schools even more onerous than it is right now. We're seemingly on this perpetual cycle on where we go, and we didn't deal with those problems there.

In any event, that's probably one of the last times – I tend to go on and on about our fiscal structure, that seems to be the decision of the government of the day, to avoid that big issue and, simply, in my view, the excess of spending all the oil wealth in one generation. Given that's what it is, I think they've missed an opportunity to do what was right for this province for the long run.

In any event, you know, always an honour to speak to this.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by saying that this was a misdirected, misleading, and underachieving throne speech.

Mr. Denis: Point of order. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you are rising on a point of order?

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: Yes. Point of order: 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as *Beauchesne's*. The member has used the word "misleading," which was ruled out by your brother Speaker earlier today to be an improper comment, and I would just ask that he withdraw that particular word.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. member, you might like to choose another word to make your point or withdraw that.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you very much. I'm sorry. I will withdraw it.

8:00

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Barnes: Starting with the title of the speech itself, Building Alberta Together, the document misfired. It's Albertans who built

Alberta, who build it now, and who will continue to build Alberta in the future. This government needs to simply stay out of the way more to make it happen, and the jargon of the throne speech does nothing for the real progress and the real innovation needed here in Alberta.

It continued to be misdirecting because parts of it were aimed directly at the Wildrose while failing to recognize this current government's continued assault on property rights, individual rights, and front-line workers. It made no mention of the Premier's habit of unfocused globe-trotting and foreign office expense accumulation. It did not focus on the bread-and-butter work here in Alberta.

A continual PC talking point of the Wildrose build-nothing plan was mentioned. Let's get the facts straight. As the Alberta government the Wildrose would actually invest \$48 billion over the next 10 years in health facilities, schools, roads, and other necessary government facilities. Our commitment to a provincial public priority list, more competitive bidding, more design/bid/build contracts would ensure more effective and efficient infrastructure spending for all Albertans, and we would not do it on the backs of future generations.

Oppositely, infrastructure projects like schools that are being announced without plans, budgets, and timelines: it will be impossible to complete them on time and not break another election promise. Worse, though, is that this way of building by political announcement and doing it on the backs of future generations will lead to huge inefficiencies, cost overruns, misallocated assets, and reduced value and services for all of us.

The throne speech makes no mention of the PCs continuing to increase the size and mandate of the provincial government. This increase in bureaucracy has been making many nervous as the South Saskatchewan regional plan chugs along with huge concerns about the economic and lifestyle consequences.

The government fails to take responsibility for a huge bottleneck in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, that has been incapable of formulating plans and policies and not recognizing the good stewardship of ranch and farming families or the many environmentally sound policies of our oil and gas companies. This is of huge importance now, Mr. Speaker, as the sage grouse protection order is in effect in 42 townships, in Cypress-Medicine Hat, and where this may lead to throughout the rest of our province.

The throne speech ended with a section entitled The Next Phase: Opening New Markets. Amazingly, the PC government has made it their priority to focus unrelentingly on selling Alberta to the world and advocating for a Canada free trade zone.

In the 22 months since the last election we have seen the Premier's Canadian energy strategy achieve not a kilometre of pipeline, not a metre of right-of-way or move a litre of diesel fuel. Instead, what we have seen is a \$1.3 billion potential subsidy to a for-profit industry, countless trade offices admissions, and a bundle of money spent on government jets.

We measure the success of our elected officials in results, and the Premier's luxurious travels to the four corners of the Earth have produced none. Amazingly, we have a Premier not even willing to wait 10 hours to fly home with the Prime Minister of Canada to discuss the very things she claims she wants to accomplish. Perhaps she could've considered that this is the man she has to talk to, to work with in order to actually achieve some of these things – interprovincial pipelines, trade agreements, and the like – to make Alberta a stronger participant in Canada.

A year ago, in an effort to hide a \$17 billion deficit looming two years from then, our Alberta PC government broke our financial situation into three budgets and added billions of dollars in P3

spending that will indebted us and our children for years to come. But this throne speech says that the government will live within its means and balance the budget. That is not a consolidated Ralph Klein style budget that would once again show the reality; this is a province billions in debt and nearly reaching the financial lows that Don Getty caused decades back.

Of course, “transparency” might be the most overused, underutilized word offered by this government. A round-table on the improvement of Alberta’s child intervention system failed to invite many of the necessary stakeholders to truly explore the problems and solutions. I for one had great hopes for this round-table, have great hopes for this type of system in the future, and I do hope the government will strive to improve it.

This government has also talked about meaningful consultations with Albertans, talked about involving the opposition more in a constructive improvement to the legislative process. Tightly managed, orchestrated, low turnout meetings in Cypress-Medicine Hat and around the province and a failure to engage in discussions around numerous opposition amendments to legislation prove that this government has no desire or little ability to be more transparent.

Lastly, I especially believe this throne speech was under-achieving. It failed to take into consideration the real challenges Albertans have. The list is endless. Wait times for elective surgery are measured in years and cancelled appointments. It’s embarrassing in Medicine Hat that our number one radio advertisers are the Great Falls and Kalispell private clinics saying: come down here; pay your money to get your elective surgery.

Municipalities are bogged down in provincial paperwork and uncertain funding levels, our education system is falling behind competitively in a fast-paced and changing world, rural Alberta is faced with economic uncertainties and government service decay, and our transportation and infrastructure spending is enormous with unacceptable results. Utility rates and their ancillary charges are skyrocketing. Everyday Albertans are feeling the hardship of this.

With this in mind, let’s take one last look at the title, Building Alberta Together. If this government truly meant that their plan was to be done together, the speech would have been completely different and the government’s 2014 priorities would have actually reflected the 2014 priorities of Alberta’s public. Instead of things like decentralization, innovative ideas, or intentions of meaningful consultation with Albertans, we heard misdirected and underachieving talking points.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the hon. member would make a comment on the issue of the economic effects of the sage grouse, that he mentioned in his response to the throne speech.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you very much for the question. It is estimated that the oil and gas industry alone in the area of the southeast corner of the province could be hit as hard as \$200 million, not considering all the spinoff and benefits that would relate to people conducting their everyday Albertan life. Although for the oil and gas industry the impact would be much more severe, quicker, it is estimated that for the ranching industry over a mid-term period of time the impact would also be as high as \$200 million. It was also, I think, put in one of the federal government’s

protection orders that the estimated impact was \$161 million, so another number that’s in the ballpark. Again, compensation doesn’t appear to be mentioned as part of the eligibility with this and is something that I hope can be addressed.

I will add to the hon. member that although, you know, with Bill 36 the regional advisory committee plan had marked 30 to 35 per cent of Cypress county as a potential conservation area, this federal protection order and where it may lead to seems to be falling right into what we all felt were grave concerns about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act right from the beginning, right from the initial stage. I will also add to the hon. member that one of the big fears in the constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat is where this may lead to for the rest of Alberta.

Thank you.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Are there other speakers to the Speech from the Throne?

Seeing none, did someone wish to move to adjourn debate on the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. Barnes: Could I adjourn debate on this, please?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 1

Savings Management Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise this evening to move second reading of Bill 1, the Savings Management Act.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have told us that saving is important, but they also want to know how our savings are supporting the province’s long-term growth and development. They want to know that they have a purpose. That was made very clear to me at budget consultations over the past couple of years and at other public forums like the economic summit the government hosted last fall. Bill 1 strikes a balance between consistently saving for the future and leveraging a portion of our savings now on targeted province-building investments that will benefit Albertans now and for generations to come while still allowing us to continue growing our savings in the heritage fund.

The proposed Savings Management Act will support innovation in the social services and cultural sectors, help address Alberta’s demand for skilled labour, and position Alberta to take advantage of future strategic opportunities. To do this, Bill 1 enhances the Alberta scholarship fund, establishes the social innovation endowment and the agriculture and food innovation endowment, and creates the Alberta future fund. Together these funds and endowments will help secure a brighter future for Alberta, moving us forward as we continue to build Alberta. Spending of disbursements from any of these funds and endowments must be for the purpose stated in the legislation and must be approved by a vote in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, it’s no secret there’s a shortage of skilled labour in this province, particularly those workers with a trade. Bill 1 addresses this issue by enhancing the Alberta heritage scholarship fund: \$200 million will be earmarked for trades-based education,

helping apprentices complete their programs, engaging industry, and promoting excellence across the apprentice system. Our aim is simple, to encourage and support people pursuing a career in the skilled trades. The Alberta heritage scholarship fund was originally established by a grant from the heritage fund, and Bill 1 will build on this precedent with a \$200 million transfer from the heritage fund in 2014. Disbursements from the earmarked portion of the scholarship fund will be limited to 4 and a half per cent of the fund's value based on a rolling three-year average of its market value. That works out to \$9 million a year, starting in 2015-16.

Providing scholarships or bursaries to encourage and assist Albertans with a career in the trades is a problem and a solution that we can wrap our minds around pretty easily. But other issues, especially those in the social sphere, are not so simple. Complex issues like poverty and family violence demand we change our thinking, working in ways that may fall outside of traditional government approaches. It's not just shovelling more money into existing approaches but instead working collaboratively with our partners to find a better way of doing things. That's where the social innovation endowment comes in, providing a stable source of funding to create new knowledge and for the development and testing of new approaches to support innovation in the social services and cultural sectors.

The social innovation endowment will be established as an account within the heritage fund and will be allocated \$500 million in 2014 and another \$500 million in 2015. Disbursements from the social innovation endowment will also be limited to 4 and a half per cent per year. That works out to 22 and a half million dollars in 2015-16 and \$45 million in 2016-17.

Mr. Speaker, I'd now like to turn your attention to the other new innovation-focused endowment, the agriculture and food innovation endowment. Agriculture is an important industry in this province, and we want it to continue to flourish, providing diversity to our economy and supporting our rural communities. The agriculture and food innovation endowment will support Alberta's agricultural innovation system, providing enhanced funding for basic and applied ag research and supporting value-added product development in commercialization activities. Like the social innovation endowment, the agriculture and food innovation endowment will be set up as an account within the heritage fund. It will receive a one-time allocation of \$200 million in 2014, which again, based on the 4 and a half percent rule, works out to \$9 million a year, starting in 2014-15.

Mr. Speaker, that's a thumbnail sketch of the three endowments covered by Bill 1. At a very basic level those endowments are about creating and exploiting opportunities to move Alberta forward, which brings me to the Alberta future fund, a different kind of fund that is being set up for a different purpose.

The Alberta future fund will enable government to capitalize on future strategic opportunities as they arise. These are large-scale, province-building opportunities that may require a large, one-time investment by the project. They may or may not be capital projects, and because the government only borrows for capital, government needs some other mechanism for responding to unexpected strategic opportunities when they come up.

These opportunities are not yet known, but the Alberta future fund will ensure we are in a position to respond when the time comes. It, too, will be established as an account within the heritage fund. The future fund will be allocated \$200 million in 2014 and \$200 million for the following nine years, to create a total fund of \$2 billion. The money will stay there and continue to grow until the right opportunity comes along, at which time the government may withdraw, following the passage of a resolution in the

Legislature, any amounts for investments that provide long-term benefits to Albertans and the Alberta economy.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, our savings, which includes the heritage fund, will continue to grow. We put a legislated savings plan in place last year, and we're still sticking to that plan. Apart from the legislatively authorized disbursements from the new account, the net income of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund will remain subject to the provisions of the Fiscal Management Act. The provisions require that by 2017-18 and in all subsequent years 100 per cent of the heritage fund's net income will be retained within the fund. As planned, we will set aside a portion of our nonrenewable resource revenue for savings right off the top every year so that the heritage fund, our savings, will continue to grow.

Mr. Speaker, I fully expect that some in this House will take this bill as some sort of strike against the heritage fund. It's not. In fact, this new vision for our savings in many ways reflects the government's original vision for the heritage fund. When the heritage fund was established in 1976, the fund's stated objectives were to save for the future, to strengthen or diversify the economy, and to improve the quality of life for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Little Bow this afternoon talked about the grain cars that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund bought to help Alberta grain producers move their product to market. They are still on the rail. In fact, I can recall seeing them on sidings in the province just last fall. I saw them at Prince Rupert, parked waiting for vessels to come in. It's still a very honourable thing to see those cars go by on the railway tracks today. That was an investment of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, if you go to the Medicine Hat airport, as an example, there is a plaque on the wall that says that the terminal at the Medicine Hat airport was built with Alberta heritage savings trust fund dollars.

Mr. Speaker, Premier Lougheed and his team at the time, of which I'm proud to say that my dad was one, had a vision for where that fund could be used. They had a vision for those three areas that Bill 1 is also emulating. So despite what many have said, the fund was not intended to simply be a vessel for saving money for future generations. It has also benefited past and present generations of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I also recognize that the heritage fund has a very special place in the hearts of Albertans. It has a special place in the hearts of every member here. I fully acknowledge that there will always be many opinions about how the fund should be managed. It's my firm and ardent belief that Bill 1 strikes the right balance between saving some of our natural resource revenue while setting out a clear vision for how the fund can be used now, and in very targeted ways, to improve the lives of Albertans now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, when you think about the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for medical research and the tremendous things that that has spawned based on the same rules of these endowments, when you think about the Alberta ingenuity fund and the tremendous research that that has provided in our province and the commercialization opportunities that are there, when you think about the access to the future fund and the tremendous amount of philanthropy that that has brought into our province, and when you think about the scholarship fund and the thousands of students that have benefited from that endowment from the heritage savings trust fund, our savings should have a purpose, our savings should be used for today's generations and future generations, and they should be leveraged. That's what Albertans told us they wanted to see. That's what Bill 1 attempts to do.

8:20

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
I recognize the Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to stand up in this House and respond to the government's proposed legislation. This is a very interesting bill. You know, many of you would be familiar with the term "mission creep," where you start out with a very laudable goal, and then over time, instead of achieving the goal that you've set out to achieve, you get distracted by other things, and pretty soon the original mission that you had undertaken has essentially failed. Nothing could be a clearer example of mission creep and the unfortunate nature of it and the unfortunate consequences that stem from it than how this government has handled the heritage fund.

There was an article in *The Economist* recently. I know that the government is always looking to build the profile of Alberta around the world, so getting an article in *The Economist* is certainly something to aspire to. The only problem with this article was that it used Alberta as the absolute poster child of how not to run, how not to handle a resource-based savings fund. The economists were right. They compared Alberta with many different jurisdictions, resource-rich jurisdictions, and basically were pointing out how poor a job successive governments have done in managing the finances of this province, particularly with regard to the heritage fund, and how so many opportunities have been lost. I'd like to discuss that because Bill 1 is another example of why we have failed as a province so perfectly with regard to how we have saved or failed to save and to fulfill the original mission of Premier Lougheed and the heritage fund.

Now, of course, research and scholarship endowments are good things. We all like research and scholarship endowments. We certainly support, in times where we have a surplus, in times where we're not going into debt, using some of the surplus to establish endowment funds for the purpose of research and innovation and scholarships in particular. We support that. But the caveat there is that it is in times where we have a balanced budget, in times where we are not going into debt. Those are the times to establish endowment funds.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, is not one of those times. We are in deficit despite a record amount of revenue this year, an all-time record for Alberta by about 2 and a half billion dollars, an all-time record for revenue, and we're still in deficit. That's a problem. Until we're out of deficit, the consolidated deficit, and into surplus, then we shouldn't be setting aside savings and doing so with borrowed money, which is essentially what we're doing this year alone, borrowing I believe it's up to \$3.7 billion. That's not what we should be doing.

Also, we need to be careful because, by the vague nature of this bill, some of these endowment funds are so vaguely described that it's very clear the money used for them, the interest generated from those funds and then given out, could easily be funneled to for-profit corporations and other companies that should not receive that type of funding. If we're going to do research into technology and so forth, obviously we could fund some of our postsecondary institutions, whether that be the U of A or Olds College or some postsecondary education institutions like that, but we should not turn this into another way that this PC government can use heritage fund money and interest from the heritage fund to fund for-profit corporations, some of them legitimately applying, some of them getting money because of their connections to the PC Party, depending on the situation.

First things first. We need to balance the budget. We need to quit borrowing. It's funny. When the budget is truly balanced, you will see us quit borrowing. That's the critical piece there. Until we stop borrowing, really, we do not have a balanced budget.

Then we need to leave the interest in the heritage fund alone. If we want to set up separate endowments using surplus money, as I stated, when we're back in a consolidated surplus, then perhaps we can do that, but don't carve out parts of the heritage fund. The heritage fund's purpose is to make sure that over the next – hopefully, we still have enough of a window here – 15 to 20 years we can put enough away and let it compound and grow with interest so that when we get to 2030 or whatever it is and the price of oil is just not high enough to be economical to develop on a mass scale because of alternative technologies and cheaper ways of getting oil out of the ground in the United States and so forth and large reserves there, when that happens, we will have a mountain of investment capital that we can use to replace that oil and gas income, that resource revenue income.

That's what we should be doing with the heritage fund, and we're not even close. We're at \$17 billion, \$18 billion. We need to get that fund up to \$150 billion over the next 20 years if we're going to get to that goal. That means putting in some serious savings. It also means leaving the interest alone. Get your hands off it, and let it grow.

Just think about this. If from 1986 to today we had just left the interest alone, not put another cent of oil and gas royalties towards it, nothing, no oil and gas royalties whatsoever, if you could have put it all towards debt and endowments and anything else you wanted from 1986 on and just left the interest alone, if what was there in 1986 had compounded, today it would have been worth – guess what? – \$150 billion. Think about that lost opportunity, Mr. Speaker. It's tragic.

If you look at a 7 per cent return on investment, the ROI, on that \$150 billion, that's roughly \$9 billion to \$10 billion a year. Guess what? That would replace our reliance and then some on nonrenewable oil and gas revenues today. We would have already achieved that goal, and now we could be using resource revenues to create endowment funds and to build whatever the hell we wanted to build. But, instead, here we are, and we haven't saved jack squat. It's embarrassing.

Here we are talking about a bill whose stated purpose is to essentially carve out pieces of the heritage fund, not the majority of it but a good percentage, \$3 billion, 3 and a half billion dollars over several years, to carve that money out of the heritage fund and use the interest to funnel into various programs and so forth. That's not the direction we should be going in. And this is after last year and the government stating that they committed to leaving all the interest in the heritage fund completely alone on a go-forward basis, starting, I believe, next year. That was the commitment that they made.

Now, we've already seen a deviation from that commitment, and we're not even a year into it, and we're using borrowed money to do it. We're creating a legacy over here of a few billion and borrowing several more billion to create that legacy and putting our kids in debt. That's the legacy we're leaving them with. I don't understand why we continue to go down this road when it's just so clear we have to stop, especially in good times, like we're in now. This is where we should be making hay, not going backwards, and we are going backwards, in my view.

Now, what would the Wildrose do differently? Well, we're really blessed in this province in that we do have a booming resource sector right now, so there is time to get this right. I don't think there's a lot of time. I don't think we're talking about 50 years now. I think the window is shrinking, but I still think there's

a window, and I think that most experts in the investment field would agree with that. Alberta's oil is still going to be worth a lot for at least another 15, 20 years, hopefully – cross our fingers – more.

8:30

So what would we do? Well, the first thing we would do, of course, is balance the consolidated provincial budget. That means all operational and capital spending. In other words, total revenues would have to be larger than total operational expenditures plus capital expenditures, including MSI, roads, bridges, schools, postsecondary, everything, all of it. Once we get back to a consolidated balance without raising taxes and without cutting front-line public services or the salaries of front-line workers, once that's done, we need to pass legislation that makes balanced consolidated budgets mandatory, restores budget transparency by including all operational and capital spending in the calculation of annual deficits or surpluses, prohibits debt financing, and caps year-over-year increases in overall government spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth.

That's important, Mr. Speaker. How we got out of whack is that we started doubling the rate of inflation plus population growth in our spending, and that's what kind of threw us all off over the last 10 years. We can't do that same mistake. That means that we will have some big surpluses moving forward, but that's okay. We can put good chunks of that into the heritage fund. We can provide the cities with a little bit more funding for LRT and other infrastructure with some of those surpluses, and we can even use some of that extra money, when we're not borrowing anymore, to set up endowments like what's being suggested here in some respect, the research endowments, for example, and the scholarship endowments.

So once that's done, once the provincial budget is balanced, we would implement the following budget surplus and savings strategy. We would not transfer any portion whatsoever of the heritage fund, including annual earnings, into general revenues until the total annual earnings from the fund exceed that of the average annual provincial revenues from oil and gas. And, yes, that will take some years to accomplish. There's no doubt about that.

We would invest at least half of all surpluses in the heritage fund until the total annual earnings from the fund exceed that of the average annual provincial revenues from oil and gas. We would direct at least 10 per cent of those surpluses to Alberta's municipalities for the purpose of building additional municipal infrastructure, at least 10 per cent, maybe more. Certainly, with our 10-10 plan, a minimum 10 per cent of surpluses.

We would direct the remaining surpluses to one or more of the following initiatives: paying down or offsetting the debts and liabilities incurred by this Premier and this government; sustainably lower personal or business taxes and fees over time or inflation-proof them, what have you; invest in infrastructure critical to economic growth and development like LRTs, for example; establish endowments and scholarships dedicated to excellence in research and education in Alberta's postsecondary institutions; and rebuild and maintain the sustainability fund for

the purposes of disaster relief and assistance and to protect against significant short-term decreases in provincial oil and gas revenues.

That's our plan, and it is a simple plan. I mean, this clearly is not rocket science, and we're not claiming that it's our idea. These are the ideas of Jim Dinning. These are the ideas of Ralph Klein. These are the ideas of Premier Lougheed. That's what they are. We're just taking them. We're borrowing them and trying to get back to them because they were good ideas and they were worth it. But we didn't stick by the plan, and because of that we have failed our kids to this point. That's not to say that every dollar that's been spent from the interest from the heritage fund hasn't gone to a good cause. It's not to say that. But we have to look at the overall performance of what we've done in this Chamber over the last 20 years, 25 to 30 years. We haven't done the job. We haven't made our fund worth what it should be.

Norway's fund, of course – and people say Alberta is not like Norway, and in some ways we're not. They have a trillion-dollar fund now. It has just gone through the roof because they've used the power of compound interest, partially. They've invested a lot in it, for sure, but it's really been compound interest, the stock market, the way they've invested large amounts. Now they are set, way past oil and gas time. Now, we're not saying that we need to be a trillion dollars up in the heritage fund. Surely, our taxes aren't 10 times lower than Norway's. They always say that the taxes are higher in Norway. They're not 10 times higher. All we're saying is: let's get our heritage fund up to about one-tenth of that amount, \$150 billion. Let's do that over the next 10 to 15 years. Let's be strict with ourselves. Let's be disciplined, and let's make sure that in 20 years we can tell our kids and our grandkids: "Look. This is what we did. We saved enough, and now you have enough to pay for your core services and to have the best institutions and the best infrastructure even though oil and gas isn't worth what it once was."

That's, I believe, the vision that Premier Lougheed had. I believe that's the vision that Premier Klein had, and I hope that one day we will return to that vision under, hopefully, a new Wildrose government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I recognize the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Not yet. It'll be after the next speaker for 29(2)(a).

Mr. Anderson: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, being that I want to be Government House Leader again tomorrow, we'll call it a night and move to adjourn till 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:37 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Issue 3a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members and guests.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, fill us with strength to labour diligently and with wisdom to speak clearly. Give us courage to speak thoughtfully and conviction to act boldly without prejudice. For this we pray. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Standing Order Amendments

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before the Clerk calls the next item of business in our Routine, I want to alert you to the green sheets that you will find on your desks, which were distributed earlier by our pages. Please note that these are the amendments to the Standing Orders that were approved yesterday by this Assembly following approval of Government Motion 7. These amendments are relevant and are immediately applicable for consideration of supplementary estimates later this afternoon.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 40 young, energetic individuals from Nellie McClung elementary school and their escorts. The school is located in the community of Palliser and serves the communities of Palliser, Bayview, Pump Hill, and surrounding areas. The students just finished a science fair, are writing and producing their own plays, and are welcoming a dance company soon to the building. This busy school offers programs of choice and activities that help build the community in Calgary-Glenmore. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would like to ask all the guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark or someone on his behalf.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm so excited about this school that I have sort of snatched the introduction away from my hon. leader. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 40 students, that are here with us today, from Annunciation school. They are here with several teachers and group leaders: Mrs. Maureen Ostrowerka, who is the grade 6 teacher; Mrs. Michelle Padilla; Mrs. Linda Girard; and Mr. Chris Koper. Sorry about the mispronunciations, anybody. I'm sure *Hansard* will fix it. Would you all join me, please, in welcoming these great students to our Assembly?

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 24 visitors from the Academy at King Edward school,

consisting of, I believe, 21 very bright and super hard-working grade 6 students. I was very pleased to be able to go the academy this September to read to a bunch of students *The Story of Mouseland*, written by Tommy Douglas, and I recall some really excellent discussions at the time. They are joined today by their teachers, Peter Beairsto and Maureen Munsterman, and by parent helper Leanne Howard. I would ask that they all now rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

If not, let's move on, then, and welcome the Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta, please.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very important people, and that's not just because I'm married to their daughter. My mother- and father-in-law are here today from Calgary, Ken and Heather Miller, and this is all made possible because Ken just retired a week and a half ago from 38 years as an engineer at ExxonMobil. Heather is a public health nurse with Alberta Health Services. They've been a great support to me and Ashley as we've gone through this great journey of being an MLA, and I do want to thank them for that support as well as thank them for raising such an amazing daughter. So I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, that's a very hard act to follow. It's a pleasure of mine to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine and a resident of the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Acadia, Dr. John Rook. Dr. Rook is the former president and CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and as president he was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the 10-year plan to end homelessness. He has a PhD from Oxford University and a long history of service to his community. From 2004 to 2010 he was the chief executive officer of the Salvation Army community services. He also has an extensive teaching background as an adjunct faculty member at the U of C since 2008 and an associate professor at McMaster University – he's an incredible gentleman – and he's also taught at Booth college as well as Ambrose University College. Dr. Rook, please rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Cheryl-Ann Orr and Barb Sinosich. If they'd please rise. These two wonderful women have had the experience with their families to experience the love and passion and compassion of Wellspring Calgary. They're here representing their big fundraising day, Toupee for a Day. It's people like this that make Alberta great. They advocate for our communities, and really it's what we're built upon. I'm proud of them and proud to introduce them in this House. Thank you for coming today. If the members could give them a warm welcome, I would appreciate that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Red Deer-North.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you today and through you to the Assembly my guests from the Non-Academic Staff Association, otherwise known as NASA, which represents more than 6,000 support staff at the University of Alberta. My guests and their team have collected

more than 4,000 advocacy postcards, signed by residents from all over the province, containing a simple message to restore funding to postsecondary education. I would now like my guests to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly: Rod Loyola, Leonard Wampler, Lilian Campbell, Dennis Johnson, Donna Coombe-Montrose, and Jamie Smith. Let's hear it for them.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some very special people. They are the family of Jon Wood, who was an exceptional young constituent of mine who was killed by a drunk driver. Jon's family have provided these pins for members of the Assembly with the words of Jon's favourite song: "keep your head up; keep your heart strong." I would ask Jon's family to rise as I call their names: Lori Church, the mother of Jon Wood; Jon's siblings Daniel Wood, Andrea Wood, Eli Church, and Eric Church; Jon's grandparents Jack Lotzien and Bernice Lotzien. They are accompanied by 12 other family members and friends, who are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery and have travelled from Calgary to honour the memory of Jon and hear my member's statement. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Neil Cashman and Dr. Bob Gundel. Dr. Cashman is a world-renowned neurologist and neuroscientist specializing in Alzheimer's disease and ALS. In July 2005 he was appointed professor of medicine at the University of British Columbia, where he holds the Canada research chair in neurodegeneration and protein misfolding diseases. He's also scientific director of PrioNet and founder and chief scientific officer of Amorfix Life Sciences. Dr. Bob Gundel is president and CEO of Amorfix, and he's a 35-year veteran of the pharmaceutical industry. Dr. Cashman will be speaking this evening in my constituency, where he'll be sharing the exciting news of a new test he has developed for early identification of Alzheimer's disease. They are seated in the members' gallery and are also joined by Mr. Roger Kotch. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Let's move on, then, to Edmonton-Riverview, followed by a repeat introduction by the Associate Minister of Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 14 members of Rotary International district 5370. These youth exchange students and new generation of youth are very excited to be here.

Among them are district 5370 governor Betty Screpnek; Jerome Martin, Rotary district image chair; Merle Taylor, my president at the Glenora Rotary; Hannah Werkgarner, youth exchange from Austria; Grégoire Vidal from France, a youth exchange student there; Henriette Olesen, a youth exchange from Denmark; Christina Haltou-Nielsen, a youth exchange student from Den-

mark; Milja Kauppinen, youth exchange from Finland; Lindsey Lam, Rotary youth exchange awards; Bashir Mohamed, also from the leadership awards; Yvone Joubert, district 53 youth council and youth conference; Amy Smith, the Rotaract club from the University of Alberta; Abdul-Rahman Madi, the Rotaract club of Grant MacEwan; and Tempo Sabatier, Rotary youth leadership experience. They're all seated in the public gallery. I would ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also see up in the gallery a former councillor from the city of Calgary for ward 4 that served from 2010 to 2013. Gael MacLeod is there. I'd hope that she could stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Premier's Travel to South Africa

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marked the sixth anniversary of the 2008 provincial election. It was March 3 – a day, I'm sure, the Premier won't soon forget – when she was elected to this Legislature for the very first time. She'll also recall that not long after that day she sat around the cabinet table and voted with her colleagues to give themselves a 34 per cent pay raise, courtesy of the hard-working taxpayers of Alberta.

Not surprisingly, there was a backlash, a big one. Albertans were furious at the brazen entitlement of their newly elected government. After an ugly and prolonged scandal the government finally relented. They announced they would return the money to taxpayers. Not all of it, though. After hiking their pay by more than a third, they gave back a measly 5 per cent. What was supposed to be a grand gesture of apology and contrition became yet another slap in the face to taxpayers. They knew they did something wrong. They knew they had to do something about it, but they still kept most of the money for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, history is repeating itself. Yesterday the Premier announced she was going to pay back her travel expenses. Not all of them, of course. Certainly not the big one. No, instead of giving back the \$45,000 she used to get to South Africa in style, she's giving back, coincidentally, about 5 per cent of that. She's going to keep the rest, an amount of money that exceeds the annual salaries of nearly 4,000 of our front-line public-sector employees. I suppose all should be forgiven.

Mr. Speaker, this is not leadership. When Albertans see this kind of personal pampering and self-service in their leaders, they lose faith not only in that individual but in the political and democratic process itself. The lasting effect of this kind of entitlement is a cynical public that believes the worst instead of hoping for the best. We should see the very best of our values and the very brightest of our intentions reflected in our leaders. It's a shame this Premier has let us down. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Government Policies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Middle-class families are starting to see the truth about the entitlement and hypocrisy of this PC government. We're living in the tale of two Albertas, where for this government and their wealthy friends and corporate donors flying first class is just a symbol for their way of life. The wealthy in this province pay less in taxes than they would anywhere in Canada. In this province wealthy Albertans can buy memberships in private health clinics to help them navigate their way to the front of the line.

But most middle-class Alberta families don't live in that Alberta. They pay more than their fair share of taxes because of the flat tax. They can't afford tens of thousands of dollars a year to avoid the long wait times in our health care system. The cost of their electricity is much too high, thanks to the PC's deregulated electricity market, which yet again benefits major PC donors like TransAlta while costing families more every year.

Albertans want a responsible and trustworthy government. They have instead a government that can't even be trusted to use a government plane for government business. Albertans want a government that invests in vital public services like health and education. They have a government that erodes the qualities of those services every year. Albertans want a government that's consistent and fair. They have a hypocritical government that freezes the wages and attacks the pensions of Albertans while wasting money on expensive travel and lavish severances.

Alberta's New Democrats will continue to fight against this hypocrisy and to fight for an Alberta that works for all of us, not just the PCs and their entourage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Jonathon David Wood

Mrs. Jablonski: "My worst days are better than some people's best days." These were words that 33-year-old Jonathon David Wood spoke and lived by. A man of endless optimism, Jon could see the positive in any situation. His youngest brother said: to Jon, success wasn't success unless you had your friends and family with you. Jon never left a man behind. He believed everyone had something to teach him. He did everything with intensity and plenty of good humour.

Jon's song was *Keep Your Head Up* by Ben Howard. He used the lyrics, "keep your head up; keep your heart strong," to lift the spirits of those around him. It was an affirmation that everything was going to be all right.

On the morning of November 2, 2013, Jon took a cab home after a night out. A short distance from his home, while stopped for a red light, Jon's taxi was struck by an impaired driver. Jon was killed instantly.

I would like to quote his mother, Lori Church.

Now we are left to pick up the pieces and go on. In a way, we all died in that taxi. We all lost something that can never be replaced. Ironically, though, Jon would find something positive to take from this inexplicable tragedy, and I can hear what he'd say: keep your head up; keep your heart strong. Your worst days will be better than some people's best days.

For Jon and for our community we must find the good in this. While we believe significant reform is needed with respect to the way our society views impaired driving, our efforts will be better invested at the grassroots level, to nurture more Jon Woods, who truly care enough to make responsible decisions.

The Jon Wood memorial fund supports programs that ignite passion and caring in young people. To learn more about Jon and

Jon's fund, please visit jonwoodmemorial.com and facebook.com/celebratejon.

Mr. Speaker, Jon's life was an inspiration to all of us. Alberta lost a very special person that night. We all lost something that can never be replaced.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Thank you. We'll begin in a moment, and we'll continue with private members' statements after question period.

Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

1:50

Premier's Travel Expenses

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we pressed the Premier to pay back the money she recklessly overspent on a trip to South Africa. We pointed out that her trip was in no way consistent with the government's expense policy. After question period the Premier agreed to pay back some money but not for the South Africa trip. Instead, we learned that the Premier admits to five other flights which don't fit the rules. To the President of Treasury Board: when did he give the Premier and her senior staff a blanket exemption from following the government's expense policy?

Mr. Horner: We've never given such exemption, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has now admitted that she doesn't follow the government's travel, meal, and hospitality expense policy. My question again is to the President of Treasury Board, whose department controls the government air fleet. Did he know that the Premier was using government airplanes for her family vacations, and why didn't he do anything about it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has answered these questions repeatedly, both in this House and in the scrum. Members of cabinet, members of government, and, in fact, even members opposite that used to be in government have used government aircraft to get to the 90 per cent of communities in our province that are not served by commercial aircraft. They've used the government aircraft to get to meetings where there was a timeliness issue, which the Premier has done as well, and in fact they have used it when family is accompanying them to government functions and nongovernment functions. It is a normal course. We've been doing it for a long time, not just this Premier but Premiers before her as well.

Ms Smith: They didn't use it for family members.

The expense policy states, "Claims should be able to withstand scrutiny by the Auditor General of Alberta and members of the public." It is obvious that many of the Premier's claims will not stand up to that scrutiny. Will the Premier do herself a favour and do the right thing and pay back the \$45,000 for the South Africa trip?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I had a long conversation yesterday with reporters, with people who are my constituents, and I talked about exactly what I talked about in the scrum yesterday, which was that after some of these questions came to light in January, I did ask my office to take a look at what had happened in the two and a half years since I became Premier. As soon as I was made aware of that information, I set the record straight and dealt with that issue. You know, the steps that we took yesterday to ask the Auditor General to look at out-of-province flights, the work I've

asked the president to do is consistent with the work that we need to do to ensure that Albertans have confidence in the system.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition, for your second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier did indeed write to the Auditor General and asked him to review the use of government airplanes. A review isn't needed. He's already done the work. In 2004 the Auditor General said that the airplane use policy wasn't as clear as it should be. He was worried that the fleet would be used inappropriately unless the rules were clarified, but he did make it clear that "family members may not travel on government aircraft unless it is the minister's spouse invited to an event." Someone in the cabinet must have known that the rules were being broken. Why didn't anyone speak up?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I travel an awful lot around this province, and one of the things that people often do when they introduce me is that they introduce me as Alberta's first woman Premier. I'm also the first Premier who is a mum. Last year, just to remind the hon. member, in Committee of Supply when the Executive Council budget was reviewed, I mentioned the fact that there are flights that I take my daughter, Sarah, on – my husband will not fly on the plane because of exactly this sort of thing – and the hon. Leader of the Opposition said: well, we wouldn't want to interfere with that because we know that that's important. So now I'm confused.

Ms Smith: The Premier also said in that exchange that she pays personally for family flights, which turned out not to be true, did it?

In 2005 the Auditor General again raised concerns about the absence of policy regarding the use of government planes, but he was told by the government that ultimately members of Executive Council are accountable for their use of aircraft. My question is for the cabinet. The Auditor General says that you are accountable. Was no one aware of this abuse of the air fleet, and why did no one tell the Premier to change her ways?

Mr. Horner: Well, I'm not sure who the hon. member was directing the question to, but as the ATS falls under my purview, Mr. Speaker, I will again reiterate what has been said here. The Premier has instructed the Auditor General to review not only what we have done but what has happened since his review in 2004 and 2005. As I recall – and I've not gone back and read it in detail – the Auditor General did believe that having that fleet at that time was a useful use of the planes because we need to be able to reach Albertans, talk to Albertans. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to see the Premier in their communities, they want to see the cabinet in their communities, because that's what reaching out to Albertans is all about.

Ms Smith: Yes, but the Auditor General didn't want to see anyone abusing it.

The fact is that no one wants to speak up. No one wanted to tell the Premier that what she was doing was wrong. The Premier has now banned all out-of-province flights on government planes for everyone, not just for herself. This leaves Albertans wondering if the problem goes further than the Premier. Are there other PC ministers that are jetting across the country on personal business? Anyone else want to fess up?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I find it incredible that in this hon. member's member's statement she talked about people losing

confidence because of trust and circumstances that, quite frankly, this hon. member throws out there month after month and year after year to suggest inappropriate behaviour, which over and over again independent offices of this Legislature have said have not been the case. So I guess we will continue to see this. We certainly want to deal with the issue. I have heard what Albertans said. I took responsibility, apologized, have taken steps, and will continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader for your third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: And that, Mr. Speaker, is why this Premier has 20 per cent approval ratings.

Family Care Clinics

Ms Smith: Yesterday the Health minister brushed off some serious questions about the state of health care in Slave Lake. While the causes of Slave Lake's problems are complex, there is no doubt that the structure and organization of the family care clinics are making the situation much worse. Doctors don't like family care clinics because they include gag orders in their contracts and have resulted in an unfair assignment of tasks within the clinics. Is the minister reviewing the way family care clinics are run so that communities like Slave Lake are not left in the lurch?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we certainly are reviewing the many successes of the family care clinic model across the province as well as the PCN model, and I'm happy to tell you that in the case of Slave Lake since the family care clinic opened, there has been a very significant reduction in nonurgent patients in the emergency department of that hospital. People in Slave Lake are getting health care closer to home. They are getting it at hours that are convenient to them. They are enjoying the benefit of many other health professionals who have not previously been available to them to support their health care needs. This is the biggest success story in health care in Alberta.

Ms Smith: It's an imaginary success story, Mr. Speaker.

In big cities like Edmonton and Calgary doctors who don't like a family care clinic have alternatives, and so do their patients, but when the minister puts a family care clinic into a small town and it goes wrong, it can disrupt all of the health care in that community. That is exactly what is happening in Slave Lake. Will the minister admit that family care clinics as currently designed are not the right solution for Alberta's small towns?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has done an excellent job of representing her constituents on this matter, and what she has told me is that they are extremely pleased with the quality and access of health care that they have, particularly compared to the state of health care after the fire only a few years ago, when there was only one doctor. What is not imaginary is that this opposition will stop at nothing to politicize health care in this province. They treat health care as if it's political currency, and every time they do so, they demean the very front-line workers who deliver care to the rest of us.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're almost getting to the point where you can actually hear the question being asked and you can actually hear an answer being given, but these additional conversations that continue to go on across the bow are really out of place. If need be, I will step in and I will shut some of you

down, and that's just how that's going to be. It goes for both sides. So let's listen attentively now to the next question, the third and final one from the leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly not blaming the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for the Health minister's mistakes.

This experiment in delivering family medicine in a new way has resulted in Slave Lake losing its anesthesiologist, its operating room, the use of its dialysis unit, and its maternity ward. Health care for the residents of Slave Lake has never been worse. Will the minister explain why any small town should be willing to take the risk of bringing a family care clinic into their community if this is the result?

2:00

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons why communities all across this province are asking for family care clinics. They're asking for the roles of their primary care networks to be expanded. It has to do with things like the fact that 50 per cent of patients in Slave Lake have now been screened for common health risks, things like colorectal cancer and heart disease. [interjections] This is a model that represents our Premier's commitment and her vision to expand health care to Albertans. It is a rejection of cheap political tactics that are aimed at dividing health care workers, particularly doctors in this province, who are also working very hard to expand this model of care.

Mrs. Forsyth: Why don't you read the other stats, too?

The Speaker: Are you done, Calgary-Fish Creek? Thank you.

Let us move on. Edmonton-Meadowlark, first main set of questions.

Cabinet Travel Expense Policy

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is trying to change the channel on Travelgate by pleading guilty to a lesser charge of \$3,100 for a family friend. But Albertans really want her to pay back for wasting \$45,000 of their hard-earned tax money and not hide behind the Auditor General. The Premier's South Africa expense is completely indefensible, and it gets worse. She billed the taxpayers \$20,000 for her executive assistant alone. To the Premier: was it absolutely necessary for you to bring your EA along, or was this just another perk you expected your inner circle to get paid for by the Alberta taxpayer?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the work that I do as the Premier of this province involves a lot of different things, and there are a lot of people who work in my office to support me in that work. One of those people is my executive assistant. My executive assistant travels with me. You know, the day that we learned the unfortunate news of the flooding in southern Alberta starting, I was on my way back from New York. I spent an awful lot of time dealing with issues of government at that time. I certainly appreciated the support of my staff in Edmonton, my staff in Calgary, the public service, and my executive assistant, who was travelling with me in New York. That is simply the way that work happens, and I'm grateful for it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All leaders here have EAs that work with us. But let's pretend for a moment that it was

necessary for the Premier's EA, or shall I say her briefcase carrier, to travel to South Africa. There is still the matter of the cost of his first-class flights to and from South Africa, \$20,000 first class. That's more than my expenses for the entire year alone as leader of an opposition party. To the Premier: why should taxpayers shell out so much money for your assistant to fly first class to and from South Africa when he could have flown economy for a fraction of the cost?

Ms Redford: You know, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that 18 months ago we put in place travel and expense policy guidelines that are transparent to the people of Alberta so that everyone knows how the expenses related to the operations of government take place. At that time you will remember that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said that not only our disclosure policy but our travel and expense policy was – let's say it together – the gold standard for this country. What I will tell you is that we do work, that it does involve expenses, that there are rules in place. We follow those rules, and I look forward to another question from the hon. member.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, they do have a really good expense policy, and the funny thing is that it's public: first class for them and third class for Albertans.

The last time a cabinet minister abused taxpayer dollars on inappropriate travel expenses, not only did the Premier make her pay it back, she fired her from her post. Now the very credibility of this government is being degraded and the reputation of every government member on this side. To the Premier. You're the leader of the province. Will you just do the right thing, please? Just pay 45,000 bucks back, and let's move on to other topics, please.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I remember at the beginning of January saying to people that we needed to do better. I took responsibility. I apologized. We've taken steps to ensure that the Auditor General can continue to have the open access that he always has on these issues.

In fact, we're very much looking forward to moving on. I was at the mayor of Edmonton's state of the city address today. He's looking to the future. He's moving on. I think the hon. member was there. Let's talk about that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. To the Premier: given that the Auditor General has already examined the policy with regard to government aircraft and he specified that family members other than spouses attending official events should not travel on a government aircraft, was she aware of this policy when she booked the trips for which she repaid the money yesterday?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we know what the Auditor General said about government aircraft in 2005 and 2006. One of the reasons we've asked him to review the policies now is because we think it is important for issues to evolve. I'll tell you, quite frankly, that one of the evolutions in this province is that you have a Premier who has a 12-year-old daughter, and because of that we're going to continue to balance everything we can to make sure that I am able to do my job to the best of my ability, that I'm able to spend time with my family. It has never been my intention and never will be my intention to in any way trick the taxpayers of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there are thousands of government employees who are women, who have families, and who are not allowed to bring their children to work. Why does the Premier believe that she is so entitled that she can do it when the employees that work for this government are not allowed to do so?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental values of Albertans are family values. When you're elected to government, whether you're an MLA or cabinet minister or Premier . . . [interjections] If you're an MLA, a cabinet minister, or Premier, one should not have to abandon their family to do their job, and when there's an extra spot . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Speaking of families, speaking of children, how do you think what you just did carried out there amongst Albertans that we're serving? I don't think it was very adultlike, and I would think that most of you would agree with me that it wasn't. So, please, let's show some decorum that is filled with the dignity which this institution, this House, is usually known for.

Mr. Deputy Premier, would you conclude your remarks, please.

Cabinet Travel Expense Policy (continued)

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a member of this government is travelling on government business on a government aircraft and there's an extra seat that you can take a family member along to participate with you, why would you not do that? Why would you not take the time with your family, involve your family in the public service that you're doing, set the example for your family in terms of how you give back to the community in every way that you can?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. ND leader for your third and final question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again, it's the tale of two Albertas: one rule for this government and their cronies and another rule for the rest of us.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is an officer of this Legislature, not the Premier's personal adviser. She's asking him to tell her how to be ethical and prudent with Albertans' money. She shouldn't have to ask. To the Premier: why do you have to depend on the Auditor General to tell you what Albertans expect you to understand already?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, based on the last two and a half years of experience in this House I'm pretty sure that if I hadn't asked the Auditor General to do it, the opposition would have demanded that I did. We are very happy to take the advice of someone who is an independent officer of this House and not, as the hon. member suggests, my personal adviser. That's ridiculous.

The Speaker: Okay. The first five main questions are done with, so now no preambles, please, to your supplementals.

Electricity Market Investigation

Mr. Anglin: Yesterday we learned that the associate minister of electricity is confident in the ability of the Alberta Utilities Commission to adjudicate the serious allegations of electricity price-fixing. Today we learned that the AUC may hold these

proceedings behind closed doors, in secret, excluding the public. Will the government exercise its authority and guarantee that these proceedings will be held in public and not behind closed doors?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I must caution this member to make sure that we do not do anything in this House to prejudice the outcome of this decision. It's up to the Alberta Utilities Commission to determine how they hold these investigations and the hearings. That is in their discretion. It's not up to the government of Alberta to direct the AUC on how those proceedings will be held.

Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: Given that the minister stated today and yesterday that she didn't want to prejudice the outcome of the proposed AUC hearing and given that the allegations levelled by TransAlta imply the AUC may have acted incompetently and possibly illegally in addition to the MSA, how can the AUC possibly adjudicate a proceeding without bias when the proceeding itself may implicate the AUC?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Mr. Speaker, I had a little bit of difficulty following around in that loop of discussion, and I would really encourage this particular member to participate in law school. I know we've had this conversation before. He seems very, very interested in this. The Alberta Utilities Commission has very clear rules. This is not unusual, for specialized tribunals like this to hear decisions. We do it with securities regulations all the time.

Mr. Anglin: Mocking thousands of Albertans – there are enough lawyers.

Given that millions of Albertans are victims of electricity price gouging and given the seriousness of these allegations levelled by both sides in this dispute, if the government will not ask the RCMP to investigate, will the government protect Albertans, recuse the AUC, and have another independent judicial body adjudicate this process?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I'd like to remind this member that protecting consumers is a priority of this government, and making sure that we protect the integrity of this market-based electricity system is in all of our interests. If this particular member has claims that he would like to assert to the RCMP, I encourage him to do that. I would do the same if I had that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Public Transit Funding

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The big-city mayors have repeatedly called on the provincial government to provide additional funding to support new LRT projects. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can he please tell us what is being done to support public transit in urban centres?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as we know, the larger municipalities, in fact all municipalities, require stable, predictable funding in order to invest in these major undertakings. The municipal sustainability initiative will provide \$11.3 billion to municipalities over the life of the program. Many municipalities

have already allocated over \$1.5 billion to transit projects through MSI.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. It is my understanding that many municipalities may have already committed their future MSI dollars to other projects. Are there any other provincial programs available to municipalities that could help them fund these transit projects?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addition to MSI – my colleague could perhaps speak about this – the Ministry of Transportation also has a program called GreenTRIP. This program, obviously, provides direct funding to transit projects. You know, I also, together with the Premier and her other colleagues, was at the state of the city speech today by the mayor of Edmonton. He said that Edmonton is worth investing in, and I couldn't agree more. Edmonton is worth investing in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs cite the GreenTRIP program. Can the Minister of Transportation tell us whether the city of Edmonton can count on a program like GreenTRIP for the southeast expansion of the LRT line?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've always supported Alberta municipalities when it comes to transportation infrastructure. GreenTRIP is a big part of our building Alberta plan, and we're committed to fulfilling our commitment by 2020. Mayor Iveson has done his job. We talk on a regular basis, and he's promoting the LRT. So far GreenTRIP has approved funding for public transit projects in 15 Alberta municipalities, totalling more than \$1 billion.

Mathematics Curriculum

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Education insulted 7,500 concerned parents and teachers who signed a petition when he dismissed concerns about his new wishy-washy, edubabble curriculum, which abandons the basic fundamentals of learning. So let's flip the switch. The following questions don't come from me; they come from Albertans. Cristian Rios, a mathematician at the University of Calgary, says that the new system is upside down, that it creates chronic confusion and an aversion to everything mathematical in students. Minister, ignore and insult me when I ask you these questions, but what do you say to experts like Mr. Rios?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I thought I said yes to his question yesterday. He had asked me; I said yes. It sounds like they can't take yes for an answer.

Mr. Speaker, the other point that I made yesterday – and they were a little loud, so maybe not everybody heard it. We pay very close attention. We're very interested if even one parent or one Albertan has an issue with any aspect of the education system. The petition that we got, the meetings that we've had, the feedback we get from postsecondary, parents, industry, anyone are going to be well thought of and are going to be taken into account as we're doing new curriculum changes, which happens on an ongoing basis.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, it would be wonderful if what he said actually matched his actions, but it does not.

Given that Donna Nixon, a math teacher in St. Albert, says that your new system has made it so that some of our grade 7 students can't even do basic addition and subtraction, never mind multiplication or division, why do you think, Minister, that you know better than experts like Ms Nixon?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not think that. That's why we want to take all of these considerations into account. We look at the research from around the world, we look at best practices, and we look at the international exams that just came back. The hon. member said sometime ago, I think, that our results had declined by 32 per cent. This was in this House on December 4. Well, if you're looking for evidence that we have a math issue, there it is right there.

Mr. McAllister: I'd give the minister a zero, but I know his government doesn't like zeros.

Considering that Jacqueline Fern, a math teacher in Red Deer, said that due to your new system students from grade 6 to grade 12 have absolutely no concept of basic math skills and pleaded with you directly to stop this bureaucratic disaster, can you again explain why you know better than Alberta parents and teachers? Minister, you're not listening to what Albertans are telling you.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think what this member is saying is just simply offensive, and it echoes what he said on December 4: "We have really hit the skids."

Our education system is fantastic. The international tests attest to that. In the international tests, as a matter of fact, it's in the area of basic math that our kids excelled, and the researchers tell me that they nailed it. The problem solving and when you're trying to apply those concepts to complex situations are where we fell down. We are making changes to the curriculum, and we are listening, but I expect that they won't be happy with that either.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: You know what happens every time I have to intervene? I take away a few seconds from your time to ask questions. I have to then do something about it because I'm not going to put up with this. I'll tell you right now; I've told you before. If I see another outburst from any of the four caucuses, then you lose the next question on the rotation period, and I will strictly enforce that. I've had enough for today, okay? So, please. No more. That's it. You've hit the top.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Wellness Initiatives

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Alberta's population grows and ages, rising health care costs will definitely test the resilience of our health care. According to Wellness Alberta over 90 per cent of our health care budget is spent on the treatment and management of chronic diseases, and many of those are preventable. My question is to the hon. Associate Minister of Wellness. Are there any efforts by our government to undertake a wellness approach, to fundamentally transform our strategy on health care and wellness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. member for his advocacy of wellness. Mr. Speaker, you know very well that we have wellness champions clear across Alberta, and I applaud all of their efforts to promote wellness and also to prevent chronic disease and injury. This obviously increases quality of life while decreasing health care costs and taxes. Wellness requires financial and personal human investment, and everyone has a role to play. Our government, I'm proud to say, is a leader when it comes to wellness. We're the only jurisdiction in this country with a provincial wellness strategy and with a special focus on wellness that our office is honoured to provide.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Luan: Thank you. To the same associate minister: will the government be able to guarantee stable and long-term funding for wellness foundations, or are we going to leave our champions in this area to struggle to find their own resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We approach wellness in many ways here in Alberta. Our government continues to advance, first of all, numerous partnerships which complement our significant investments in primary care, that are designed to promote wellness and early intervention. We also fund and support healthy eating and active living as well as mental wellness in schools and workplaces and community settings. There are many initiatives: nutrition guidelines for children and adults, Healthy U, Alberta healthy school community wellness fund, Communities ChooseWell, ever-active schools, Premier's award for healthy workplaces, Uwalk, just to name a few. Please visit, everyone in Alberta, healthyalberta.com for a gold mine of wellness initiatives.

Mr. Luan: A last supplemental question. I heard a long list of things happening. Is this really making a difference to Albertans' lives, or is it not lip service?

Mr. Rodney: I'll tell you that folks in a couple of categories would definitely beg to differ. For instance, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act created a \$500 million endowment fund that provides \$25 million every year for 25 years to support cancer research, prevention, and screening. Alberta's strategy for tobacco-free futures aims to prevent and reduce and protect Albertans from the harms of tobacco and tobaccolike products as well as second-hand smoke.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many other examples, that you know more than most folks. There's a long way to go, but as long as we have the best choices made by individuals and the creation of a society that makes the healthy choice the more attractive and easier choice, we're on the right track.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Hehr: I didn't get to ask today's question yesterday, so let's try again. TransAlta Corporation was criticized last week for alleged manipulation of the electricity market, but they cite documents that show the government may have the most serious explaining to do. To the minister: when the MSA adopted policies and procedures allowing economic withholding, in other words price gouging, was it implementing government policy, or if it

wasn't, why did the government not step in to stop Albertans from being gouged on their power bills?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Again, protecting the consumer is a first priority. The Market Surveillance Administrator is well qualified, Mr. Speaker, to examine these situations. They have experience in this kind of issue, and they are doing their job. It's up to us to let them do their job.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the minister is listening to the question very closely, so I'll try it again. When the MSA adopted policies and procedures allowing economic withholding, in other words price gouging, was it implementing government policy, or if it wasn't, why did the government not step in to stop Albertans from being gouged on their power bills?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: The MSA was reviewing a policy regulation in consultation with lots of different organizations and companies. The Alberta Utilities Commission has the mandate to provide oversight of that, as they have been doing and continue to do.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, again I'm not getting a clear answer. Was the MSA implementing government policy when it wrote in their directives that they would allow for the economic withholding or price gouging that led to Alberta consumers paying increased prices on their power bills?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Again, I will repeat and caution this member that we will not prejudice the outcome of this case. The Market Surveillance Administrator is carrying out its functions. It's very Wild Westish in the extreme and speculative to suggest what the member is suggesting here.

Social Innovation Fund

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, with Bill 1 this government signalled that they will implement social impact bonds, a failed U.K. austerity scheme which outsources the delivery of crucial social services. The truth about these bonds is summed up well by the leader of the U.K. Official Opposition. The government is, quote, cynically attempting to dignify its cuts agenda by dressing up the withdrawal of support with the language of reinvigorating civic society. End quote. Can the Minister of Finance explain why instead of funding programs for Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, he proposes to fund wealthy investors who will profit from the misery of others?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the hon. member must not have been present or did not hear my speech on Bill 1 last night in this House. He would have then realized that Bill 1 is in addition to what is our normal operating budget. In fact, what the endowment is set to do is to do things that are outside the normal operations of government, to do things that would be innovative, to try to solve some of these complex problems. I would suggest that the hon. member might want to talk to people like the Edmonton Community Foundation and some of the not-for-profits, who are eagerly awaiting the ability to try some of these innovative ideas.

Mr. Bilous: Eagerly awaiting stable, predictable funding.

Mr. Speaker, given that we've seen this government's attempts to undermine the public sector and cut funding to nonprofits, all part of privatization by stealth, and given that stable, predictable funding for public services is the number one priority for

Albertans, why is this government pursuing an unproven scheme that will allow investors to profit off Alberta's most vulnerable?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's a very narrow interpretation of a social innovation fund to say that it's all about social impact financing. However, that's not to say that one shouldn't keep an open mind to every different way of financing social operations. We have issues, social issues, in this province. We have a social policy framework put in place. What we need to do is get the community to embrace those issues, to step forward into those issues, and make sure that every Albertan has a chance to succeed. Social impact financing is one way and only one part of the social innovation fund.

Mr. Bilous: So the minister is basically summing up. They are going to privatize social services.

Given that in 2011 the Premier promised to implement social impact bonds and given that in 2012 she promised to end child poverty in five years, for some reason this government is only keeping one of those promises, the one that benefits wealthy investors and endangers the services which lift children out of poverty. To the Premier: why?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely absurd to suggest that wealthy finances are going to get more wealthy off social impact bonds. Social impact bonds, or social impact financing, is a way in which investors can show social conscience and then use their money in a social way in the community and take a lower return but benefit the community. Again, the social innovation fund is about so much more than just social financing. It's about how we bring innovation to the social agenda, and that's an extremely important initiative for this government and this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Red Deer-North.

Small-business Regulations

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This out-of-touch PC government seems to be ignoring the impact of overregulation on the lives of Albertans. During the recent red tape reduction week Albertans shared horror stories about battles with bureaucracy as they tried starting or growing their small businesses. Recently a constituent of mine received some Transportation department tickets. When he complied with one set of rules, he was fined because it made him offside on another set, a new set. When he changed, he was fined again for breaking the first set of rules. What is the minister doing to eliminate this kind of dysfunctional overregulation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park just recently completed a consultation with small businesses across the province. One of the things that small business is telling us is that what they want is access to good information, to be able to understand regulations, and to be able to comply easily with regulations. They recognize that regulations are important to the operation of a society. However, we have made a commitment to reduce and eliminate unnecessary regulations and, certainly, to clarify and ensure that we don't have regulations operating on each other. So I would very much appreciate getting those types of ideas because we often hear about overregulation, but we don't hear the specifics about what we can do about it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be glad to share that information with the minister. Thanks for the opportunity.

What tangible, concrete evidence can the minister table in this Legislature that demonstrates that real action is in fact being taken on reducing red tape and this kind of counterproductive dysfunction for Alberta businesses?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that published a statement recently that Alberta was the best place in Canada to do business, and I think that businesses continue to indicate that as well. But we can always do better. Rather than simply this broad generalization that seems to happen time after time – and I'm not saying that this hon. member is saying it, but generally speaking, we say that red tape and regulations get in the way. We need to start specifically addressing those regulations that should be reviewed to see whether they still make sense, whether they're still necessary, whether they're understandable, whether they can be complied with easily. Those are the things we commit to do, and every time someone wants to bring a regulation into effect, they can go onto the website or . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit today to acting on the 2012 Red Tape Reduction Task Force report: Focusing on What Matters by implementing an integrated strategy for systematically making life and businesses simpler and more cost-effective for all Albertans?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that it is my job each and every day to work systemically to make it easier for businesses to do business in this province, to reduce red tape or regulations where they're no longer necessary or where they're not easily compliant, and to ensure that it's easy to do business within this province, within the necessary regulations with respect to environment, transportation, and those things which also make our province a safe place to live. So it's that balance between appropriate regulations appropriately enforced and constantly reviewing to see if they're still relevant and needed and getting rid of them when they're not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Little Bow.

Prescription Drug Coverage

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a considerable amount of discussion in the media about potential changes to the drug plan for seniors, and as a consequence seniors in my constituency expressed concerns. They're very worried that they will have to choose between prescription drugs and food on the table. Seniors today are very happy with the seniors' drug plan now and wonder why it's being altered. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health. What changes are being made to the seniors' drug plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, seniors in Alberta and other Albertans who are part of other programs enjoy some of the most comprehensive drug coverage in Canada, and I can assure the House that they will continue to

receive that. The government will not be proceeding with income testing for patient contribution towards drug costs as had been announced, but what we will be doing is continuing our drive to ensure that we have the lowest drug prices in Canada, both those paid by the taxpayer and those paid by employers and Albertans. We will be continuing to consolidate the 18 programs currently across government to achieve administrative efficiencies. This is good news for Albertans and for taxpayers.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what's the timeline in making these changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll certainly have more to say on this after the provincial budget is tabled in the House tomorrow. This is going to take some time. As we've explained before, the consolidation of 18 programs in various ministries across government is a complex process. Part of this work involves creating a common formulary, or drug benefit list, so that Albertans enjoy a consistent level of coverage. The other part of this work is that Alberta will be continuing to lead the charge to urge the federal government to work with us as provinces and territories to develop a national catastrophic drug program.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what reassurances can I give my constituents and all Alberta seniors that they will not be adversely impacted by these changes?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can certainly assure her constituents and all Albertans that they will continue to get the prescription drugs they need in a program that continues to be the best in Canada. We are looking at ways, as I've said, of improving the delivery of programs; reducing redundancy by consolidating the 18 drug and supplementary benefit programs; continuing to push for lower drug costs, not for just this province but for all of Canada; and, of course, making sure we're doing all we can to extend drug coverage to those Albertans who currently do not have that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Rural Seniors' Transportation Needs

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday's throne speech was full of promises from this PC government, and you can always be assured that the opposition and Albertans will be holding you accountable. The government has consistently failed to provide adequate protection and care for seniors. For rural seniors access to essential services in large cities is largely based on an individual's ability to drive. In light of the throne speech's recommitment to aging in place and what this government is going to do with transportation needs to help our rural seniors, to the Associate Minister of Seniors: have you considered providing stable funding for handibuses in rural communities? Your first question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question, hon. Member for Little Bow. Yes, my first question in this House.

Mr. Speaker, our seniors in this province are the ones that are responsible for the quality of life that we have today. We enjoy

that quality of life because of all the hard work that they've done on our behalf, and we'll continue to do that. With respect to the member's question on transportation I do not have an answer for him today. But we're, of course, always open to any discussion, any ideas that make life better for seniors in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always open to discussions also with the minister.

Can this Associate Minister of Seniors help me understand how he intends to address aging in place without a competent plan to tackle transportation needs for all seniors in Alberta, not just the ones living in the cities?

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, our commitment to seniors for accommodations in this province has been to add 5,000 new spaces over five years, and we're actually on track for that right now. The intent is for our seniors to be living in the communities or close to the communities that they've spent their lives in. They can live in these facilities as couples. They're close to their families. That's been our target. With respect to transportation this is often done in co-operation with the municipalities and local volunteer groups, and we'll continue to support that.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final question.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Minister. Would the minister be willing to meet with the communities of Hays, Vauxhall, and the MD of Taber and the county of Vulcan to help establish a sustainable program that would allow all seniors to have access to handibuses in rural Alberta?

Mr. Quest: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

First Responder Communications System

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2011 the province has allocated almost \$400 million to a public service radio network called the Alberta first responder radio communications system, or AFRRCS. Since that time the scope has been limited by eliminating any data capability, limiting it to only police services. The project was originally set to be completed in February 2014. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: when will the project be completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do expect the project to be fully completed in the next two years. Just so the member knows, of 332 sites there are 57 that are complete, and 107 are on their way to completion. This is also a very important project for rural communities, specifically our first responders throughout the four corners of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Young: Thank you. To the same minister: given that API3 was eliminated from the budget last year, what is this government's plan to enable information sharing amongst Alberta's police services and the RCMP?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member has been no fan of API3 at all. In fact, I had frequent meetings with him last year in

which he had wanted API3 to be completely taken away. I actually took his advice along with several others, and we decided to move the hardware into other areas and act in the interest of the taxpayer as always.

Mr. Young: To the same minister or the Minister of Municipal Affairs: are there police services in Alberta or municipalities that are asking for this system today?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this is a very important program for all of our first responders throughout all of Alberta, particularly in rural Alberta. We have regular meetings with our contractors but also with the individuals that will be served by this particular program. I'm very confident that we're on the right track and that within the next couple of years we'll be fully onside and that our first responders will have the best possible radio system throughout the entire province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Public Safety Legislation

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall Albertans were saddened to hear of the death of Quanto, an Edmonton Police Service dog who was killed in the line of duty. At the time the Minister of Justice stood with all Albertans in their outrage, saying: police dogs are almost like another police officer. For people who require service dogs because of hearing or sight issues, service dogs are an important part of their very well-being. The minister pledged to strengthen the Service Dog Act to include penalties for those who harm or kill service animals. In fact, he said that he'd like to have it for this spring session. Minister, when are you going to table it?

2:40

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that this member uses a service dog, and I welcome her input in this particular area. I've had meetings with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and also the police. We want to ensure that we get this done right the first time. But, more importantly, I'm also looking forward to what the federal government is doing because the federal government mentioned Quanto's law in its throne speech a couple of months ago, and we will continue to work with our federal counterparts and see if we need to do anything provincially depending on what the federal government decides to do on a national basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Minister, you used the excuse for not proclaiming my Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography bill, and you then blamed the feds, and it's four years later. Given that Saskatchewan has provincial penalties for those who commit violence against service animals, when will you bring the same protection for service dogs to Alberta?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind this member that had we proclaimed her bill, there would be less protection for children in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given her mandate to champion efforts to protect Albertans from issues of family violence and sexual exploitation, will the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, who I know loves children, commit to ensuring the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act is proclaimed into law?

Ms Jansen: I would like to thank the member for her question, and I would also like to thank the member for her service in this area and her input in the last little while. These are areas that I'm proud to say that we are fully committed to. We've held two round-tables in the past six months on child sexual abuse. We are committed to putting together a sexual violence framework. I have asked for the member's input on that. That topic and all those topics will be a part of our sexual violence framework. I welcome the conversation that we will have in the near future.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order was noted at 2:41.

I think we're done, then, are we?

Okay. In 30 seconds from now we'll resume with Members' Statements, starting with Calgary-Glenmore.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore for a private member's statement, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Toupee for a Day

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is Wellspring Calgary's Toupee for a Day. Toupee for a Day was begun as a means of providing visible support to those who are living with cancer and those who love them. Each multicoloured toupee represents a different type of cancer. Today participants will wear their toupees to raise money and awareness for Wellspring Calgary.

Wellspring was founded in 2007 and provides support, resources, and programs for anyone living with cancer as well as added support for their loved ones. Programs offered by the charitable organization are free of charge and do not require referral. It's the only charitable organization of its kind in western Canada. The volunteers that work tirelessly to support the needs of those suffering from cancer as well as their family and friends, including Cheryl-Ann Orr and Barb Sinosich, who were with us in the members' gallery today, make Wellspring Calgary a successful organization.

On Monday, March 3, the PC caucus, including our Premier, donned toupees and took a group photo in support of this important cause to gain awareness for Toupee for a Day, and I believe it's all over the social media networks as we speak.

Mr. Speaker, organizations such as Wellspring Calgary are crucial to building even stronger and healthier communities in Alberta in several locations. Wellspring builds in Alberta warm and welcoming communities that ensure that no one will have to face cancer alone. I encourage all my colleagues to raise awareness for Toupee for a Day.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Agriculture Literacy Week

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share with you that March 2 through 8 is the third annual Agriculture Literacy Week in Canada. Alberta is part of Agriculture in the Classroom Canada, a national organization of provincial ag in the classroom programs. Through this organization the provinces work collaboratively to develop curriculum-appropriate education materials for teachers and students. Learning about agriculture and how food makes its way to our tables every day is the foundation of this educational approach.

Agriculture Literacy Week will see classrooms of students participate in activities to learn about, connect to, and understand this important industry. Some of the educational initiatives these organizations offer include *All about Food*, which is a series of materials that includes a teacher's guide, student activities, and information about farm safety; and a favourite of mine, *The Real Dirt on Farming*, which is a reference manual with students' questions answered by farmers from across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is that largest sustainable industry in Alberta and accounts for a record \$9.2 billion in exports. There are more than 40,000 farms in Alberta, and the industry employs over 75,000 people. Today's youth are tomorrow's agricultural entrepreneurs. We know that it is an important part of our rural development to engage today's youth and new farmers in continuing and growing the legacy of Alberta's agricultural sector.

The government of Alberta is proud to recognize Agriculture Literacy Week. We extend our thanks to the organizations that are working with industry and educators on these important programs for Alberta's youth. I would encourage you all to go to YouTube and look up the video *Long Love This Land*. It is an ATB video that gives you a lot of information. It's inspiring.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Acute Health Care in Consort

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 the government temporarily shut down acute-care beds in Consort because of a lack of physician services. The bed closure was supposed to be temporary, but the months have turned into years.

I stood in this House and raised this issue in March of last year. I was assured that the government would work with the community to get this facility reopened.

Again in May of last year I stood in this House and addressed this issue with the Health minister. Unfortunately, the minister responded with: "The decision around matching physician supply with the ability to open acute-care beds is more complex, of course, than simply the availability of physicians. There are many other support staff that are needed." However, that is not what was promised to the community of Consort, which has met all of the requirements put on them by this government. Yet Consort continues to wait for a timeline concerning the reopening of their acute-care beds.

The community of Consort has gone out and recruited the doctors and even built them new homes in an effort to reinstate these life-saving acute-care beds promised by this PC government. In response, their efforts have been answered with nothing more than excuses. Unfortunately, excuses do little to help the people in need of emergency care. Another promise made, another promise broken.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 3

Securities Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce Bill 3, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

Members will note that this was originally introduced as Bill 42 last fall. This bill was originally introduced in November but did not pass before the fall session was concluded.

Bill 3 will further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's security laws as part of the ongoing collaborative reform of Canada's securities regulation. Bill 3 focuses on over-the-counter derivatives and the harmonization of derivatives regulation in Canada. As members of this House may recall, the lack of transparency with this type of investment was cited as a contributing factor in the global financial crisis in 2008.

Bill 3 creates a statutory framework for the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives, providing the Alberta Securities Commission with the authority to make rules such as mandating central clearing, trade reporting, electronic trading, solvency, and other conduct requirements for those trading in derivatives. Provincial and territorial regulators will be encouraged to agree on a harmonized approach to regulating derivatives capable of being adopted across Canada. Bill 3 is an important step in that direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

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

2:50

Bill 4

Estate Administration Act

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act.

The bill continues the work of the succession law project by modernizing and reorganizing the Administration of Estates Act, the Devolution of Real Property Act, and substantive rules from the surrogate rules.

The current estate administration law is not easily accessible or understandable. There is little guidance to help personal representatives understand their role and responsibilities in their dealings with a deceased person's estate. Bill 4 is intended to make the laws dealing with estate administration more modern, user friendly, and easily accessible. It will make it easier to understand the role of the personal representative in carrying out the final intent of the deceased. It is intended to reduce delays and costs for personal representatives, beneficiaries, and their advisers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 201
Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight)
Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce another bill, Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 201 would amend this act, setting Fusarium graminearum levels for Alberta seed and feed at .5 per cent. Currently there is a zero-tolerance Fusarium level in effect for seed produced across the province. This zero-tolerance level puts Alberta farmers and producers at an economic disadvantage compared to other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Ensuring that Alberta farmers and producers get a fair price for their seed is integral to the government's plan to maintain a competitive economic future for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

Bill 202
Independent Budget Officer Act

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise to introduce for first reading Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act.

It's no coincidence that I am tabling this bill the day before the provincial budget is to be read. My colleagues on this side of the House and I fully expect tomorrow's budget to continue to baffle Albertans as it is broken apart in ways that are so difficult to comprehend. It saddens me, Mr. Speaker, that a Premier who campaigned on open accountability and transparency has repeatedly broken that promise and changed the most comprehensive budgetary reporting as was introduced under the leadership of Premier Ralph Klein.

Bill 202 seeks to remedy this going forward by providing an opportunity to members and to the public to receive government financial information and budget estimates through an independent third party that reports directly to the Legislature. I believe that the independent budget officer will allow all members of this Assembly to better represent their constituents. As a result, Albertans can expect a more responsible and accountable government.

I look forward to the debate on this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and table the appropriate number of copies of 176 letters from my constituents. These letters speak to the concern and opposition to a proposal by Goldenkey to drill exploratory wells in the urban areas of my constituency. There is incredible concern by our community, by our city council, and by our chamber of commerce, and I'm here tabling these letters today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(3) I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of the schedule for the 2014 main budget estimate debates.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you have one?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I have two tablings today. The first is from Melissa Kehler, and she is quite concerned about access to psychological services, believing, rightly, that the mental health needs of Albertans are not being met, particularly because the services of psychologists are not funded under provincial health plans, and is urging the government to take more action.

The second is a letter I received from Lori Germaine. She's a youth support worker who accompanied a youth into the Alberta Works office and was quite appalled at the belittling, degrading, oppressive, and appalling interrogation she felt the youth received, and she details that in her submission.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Sorry. Cardston-Taber-Warner, my apologies. I have you on the list. I just overlooked it, so go ahead.

Mr. Bikman: I won't take it personally, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

I have the requisite number of copies to table of a letter sent to me by Cliff Bullis of Jay's Towing Service, commenting on an accident that occurred about a week or so prior to the sending of the letter, expressing concern about the hazard that it is to be a tow truck operator and wondering if we can't look at this and perhaps find a better way to alert the public to the dangers that add to the hazards that tow truck operators are working under.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Seeing no others, I am pleased to rise and table five copies of the page biographies for the Second Session of the 28th Legislature, spring 2014. I encourage you to have a look at our pages.

Hon. members, it is just about 3 o'clock, so we can squeeze this in. There is one point of order that was raised by the Member for Airdrie, that came up during a response to a question, the response being given by the Solicitor General. I'm not sure if this is more a clarification point or what, but let's hear what you have, then.

Calgary-Fish Creek.

Point of Order
Factual Accuracy

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am, I guess, troubled to rise on a point of order. I'm going to use the citation, if I may, of 23(h), (i), and (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I honestly am troubled, quite frankly, by the answer that I received from the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General when I asked him the question about the child pornography bill. I think his answer was that the bill would be making children more unsafe. I guess I want to first of all remind the minister exactly what was contained in the bill, that "any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a representation or material is child pornography shall immediately report the matter to a reporting entity."

3:00

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have a reputation, if I may, in this House from the 21 years that I've served in this House for the work that I've done on the protection of children. I've spent the entire 21 years of my career protecting children in this province. I'm deeply hurt and deeply saddened on behalf of Albertans and all the children that I have helped for this minister to say that it makes children more unsafe. I need to remind the minister that I brought forward the PCHIP legislation, which was the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, which, if I may say, was the first in North America. We have literally pulled hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of children off the street that have been involved in prostitution. I brought the first Amber Alert to Canada, to this province and then took it right across this country as the minister. And I can go on and on about some of the things that I've done in regard to protecting children in this province.

When I brought forward the mandatory reporting of children involved in prostitution, if I recall – and I will have to go back to *Hansard* – I think this minister stood up and spoke in support of this particular legislation. You know, I have asked him repeatedly about the fact of the importance – as a previous minister of the Crown you don't always have to wait for the federal government to do something. It's always a good initiative to kind of take the lead, that we've always been proud of in this particular province, on the protection of children involved in prostitution. He could have used the excuse on the .05 legislation that the federal government has under the Criminal Code .08, that kind of thing.

I guess that for me and on behalf of the people that serve in this Chamber and, for that matter, Albertans and all of the children that have been involved in child pornography – and I know full well that this minister in his position, quite frankly, because I was in that position as Solicitor General, sees horrific things come across his desk in regard to the horrendous, awful things that are happening to children in this province in child pornography, so I'd ask him to withdraw his remarks.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, do you wish to clarify?

Mr. Denis: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I, like this member, will never apologize for standing up for children's safety. I thank her for the past work that she has done, but my comments were true and accurate, and I will quote directly from a legal opinion that I've received from an independent lawyer as part of the Alberta Justice department on October 1, 2012:

- (a) The limited use that may be made of this information [is concerning]; and
- (b) The lack of a prohibition on letting the suspect know they have been reported, thus giving the suspect an opportunity to destroy the evidence.

That is their legal opinion about Bill 202.

The opinion goes on, Mr. Speaker, to indicate that proclaiming Bill 202 into force

would lead to legislation that would create a mandatory reporting scheme that would create information that would be difficult for law enforcement agencies to use.

Perhaps most importantly,

it would allow [Internet service providers] to circumvent federal data retention rules and prohibition from notifying the suspect.

Mr. Speaker, with respect, I do appreciate this member's commitment to children's safety, but at the same time, proclaiming her bill would provide less protection for children in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. You know full well that points of order should not be taken as an opportunity to prolong debate on this

matter. We've had a former minister, now the private Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, indicate her comments. They are on the record clarifying the work she did and her intentions in that regard. We have the Minister of Justice's opinion plus an opinion he solicited from outside, and I believe we've heard enough on this matter.

It's a point of clarification, two different versions of the same story, if you will, and we're just going to move on.

That concludes the Routine. Let us go on to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 4: Mr. Barnes]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday's throne speech was an opportunity for the Premier and her PC government to hit the reset button on several fronts and lay out a positive and achievable vision for Alberta's future. Now, I always enjoy throne speech day because of all of the ceremony of the day, and maybe it's because I'm feeling so warm about having participated in that as an observer that I'm going to start with some positive things that I liked about the throne speech. It really shouldn't be all that surprising that we're able to find a few things that we agree with.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek explained how the negotiation goes between a government and our Lieutenant Governor when it comes to issuing the throne speech. It's a bit of a negotiation where he finds in the government's agenda the things that he agrees with. Now, I know that the Lieutenant Governor, His Honour, is an honourable man. I have found many areas of common agreement with him, and I think he articulated several things in the speech that we can all agree Alberta should aspire to. I don't think that many of the concepts that were enumerated in the throne speech are of a partisan nature.

I think that all of the caucuses can agree on certain aspects of it; for instance, asserting Alberta on the world stage. The government and the Premier well know that when she is travelling abroad, we support the efforts that she's doing to represent Alberta's interests. We just have an issue when she travels abroad on personal travel and tends to bill that to the taxpayer. But when she does her work on the international stage representing Alberta's interests, we're very supportive of that.

I noticed that the throne speech mentioned twice that Alberta is the lowest tax jurisdiction. It mentioned that we've got the most jobs and the highest incomes, but it was the fact that it mentioned twice that we are the lowest tax jurisdiction that gives me some hope that the government has turned away from some of the initial types of comments they were making when this Premier first came into the position when she talked about reviewing the Income Tax Act and seemed to suggest she'd be looking at a whole new range

of additional taxes. Plus, as we're going into a discussion about big-city charters, I can take some comfort that because the lowest tax jurisdiction was mentioned twice, that may be an indication that the government might be interested in following our approach of better revenue sharing as opposed to giving new taxation powers.

I also noticed in the throne speech that they mentioned my old boss the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in acknowledging that Alberta has the friendliest small-business environment. I think we can always aspire to do better and that we should continue to lead the country. I think my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner identified some areas that were slipping. Particularly on the regulatory front, it certainly would have been nice to see, as there has been in previous throne speeches, some mention to reducing the regulatory red tape and paperwork burden on our small-business community.

One thing that warmed the cockles of my heart: the idea that they were finally, finally, finally going to commit to reducing spending to less than inflation plus population growth, something that the MLA for Airdrie has been a tireless proponent and advocate for for many years in his alternative budget and budget recommendations. It finally sunk in, Mr. Speaker, that this is the kind of approach you need to take. In an environment where you have volatile revenues, you actually need to keep a handle on spending. I'll congratulate the government if, indeed, they actually end up committing to and implementing that the way we had expected that they would.

I did also acknowledge and think it's very important that the throne speech acknowledges that we need to take seriously the issue of aboriginal consultation. I, of course, have demonstrated how serious I take this issue as I am the critic for Aboriginal Relations. I notice today that Jim Prentice has been seconded to work with Enbridge and the other pipeline companies and proponents of the Gateway proposal to be able to try to work as an advocate and intermediary between the different parties to try to get a pipeline proposal approved with our First Nations communities. I think it's a very positive step, and I'm looking forward to seeing how that develops.

The issue of new flood mapping. Once again, this is something that we have been advocating since the weeks following the flood. We had wished that the government would have done it in the right order. Instead of arbitrarily identifying communities that needed to have flood payout, we would have preferred to see flood mitigation measures, new flood mapping, and then see the compensation follow from that point. They've got it backwards, but at least they're committing to that in this throne speech, and we'll see how that ends up playing out. I think we have a huge opportunity to make sure that this does not fall off the radar as it has in previous years.

After the flooding of 1995 and the flooding of 2005 there were recommendations that never got acted upon. I think in this case where the two hardest hit ridings were the ridings of the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition, it guarantees that we're going to be able to keep the pressure on to make sure that we see some action on this. I'm sure that the Premier is receiving the same phone calls that I am, and I'm hopeful that this time we're actually going to see the government take the actions they need to take to be able to protect our communities in southern Alberta.

3:10

I'm glad as well to see a renewed commitment to ensuring that our friends in rural Alberta are supported. I'm so proud of my caucus colleagues from Little Bow, Strathmore-Brooks, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Lacombe-Ponoka, and Rimbey-Rocky Mountain

House-Sundre. They went on a grain tour over the weeks leading up to session to be able to hear directly from farmers the impact that the disruption in rail service was having on their businesses and gave some fantastic feedback, which we intend to continue to press the federal government to take action on. I'm glad that this is an issue that is on the government's radar screen as well, in addition to issues such as country of origin labelling, more education in home communities through distance learning, and completing the last mile of broadband Internet access.

In addition, the new relationship with cities and other municipalities has been an issue that my colleague from Calgary-Shaw has been an outspoken advocate on. We've put forward a proposal, which I hope the government takes a close look at. As ideas go, this would be one we wouldn't be upset if they stole because we think that this is exactly the kind of new relationship and partnership that we need to have with our municipalities to recognize their area of autonomy, recognize their status as another order of government, and give them the long-term stable funding they need to be able to meet the needs of their community.

There are some whoppers in the throne speech that I do have to address. One of the lines, "building nothing would sacrifice Alberta's future," is clearly not an option. I'm not sure why this line would appear in the government's throne speech. It's pretty clear that none of the parties represented in this Legislature, none of the caucuses have a build-nothing agenda. If you look at our plan for 10 years – investing in infrastructure, \$50 billion, and doing it debt free – we recognize that building infrastructure is a core government function, a core business of government. It is unfortunately the government opposite, that has had such wild variation in infrastructure spending and the lack of certainty that they've given to our partners in postsecondary education, health care, education, municipalities, and other areas, that has created this level of uncertainty. We clearly need to have a new funding model to be able to ensure that we can build all the infrastructure that we need when we need it without going into debt.

The throne speech also said that the government "will stay true to its word and be there with the education, health care, and infrastructure [that Albertans] need." Once again I have to question the kind of examples that they brought forward, touting family care clinics when the Slave Lake example has shown that the family care clinic being implemented is an absolute disaster and is actually reducing the services in our small-town communities. I would hope that the Health minister would take seriously that lesson and, rather than forge ahead with a failed plan, that he would do the proper consultation with our physicians to make sure that he's not putting any other small communities at risk.

The acknowledgement of highway 63. We're pleased that the Transportation minister finally did put that on a faster timeline, but it's a bit of a stretch to say that the highway 63 project is going to be completed in full and on time. As my colleague from Calgary-Shaw pointed out, it's about 10 years late. In fact, when the new announcement came out that they were going to finally prioritize this, my colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills pointed out that the construction was taking place at a snail's pace. The *Calgary Herald* decided to actually map out: if construction had started and a snail had started at the same time that this project was proposed, which would have gotten further faster? The snail would have moved along further and faster than the government did on this project. So it's a bit rich for them to claim that it actually was in full and on time. We're pleased that they finally did end up fast-tracking it after all of the delays. I think this would be a wonderful service to our friends in Fort McMurray and absolutely essential in supporting the economic growth up there.

The issue of education: to ignore the full-scale parent and teacher revolt that is taking place over the new math and to forge ahead anyway despite the fact that there is all of this push-back, 7,500 individuals signing a petition, and I predict it's going to be several thousand more before they're done. The fact that this government is so tone-deaf that they don't realize they're going too far too fast on a flawed model I think is something that should be very worrying for parents.

The argument that they made, that they froze MLAs' pay following a cut: well, let me tell you my recollection, Mr. Speaker. I recall passing the Major report here, and MLAs at that point were making \$144,000 per year. By the end of that year the Members' Services Committee, the PC members anyway, voted for an increase, and then we were making \$156,000 a year. By the old math that's an 8 per cent increase, but under the new math I guess it's whatever the Premier says it is. So I would have to say that the fact of the matter is that that's another whopper in the throne speech, and I think it's unfortunate that the government is trying to push forward false information to the public. I just wanted to call that out.

In addition, we already see that they're hedging their bets on the new school promise. We all recall the promise in the last election of 50 new schools and 70 more modernizations before the 2016 election. Well, I'll point you, Mr. Speaker, to the question yesterday from my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka. All there is on the Blackfalds site is a PC-branded Building Alberta sign and a couple of posts. That's what the promise for a new school in Blackfalds looks like, no shovels in sight, and I can tell you that that's what we're hearing all around this province.

When the Education minister says that we're going to see all of these schools built before the next election, why, isn't that interesting? The throne speech said that it's going to be built over the next three years. Well, three years would take us to 2017, which would actually be after the next election. So I'm just going to put it out there that my guess is that the government is just using this as an election ploy and that they don't really have any intention of meeting the objective of getting these projects built before the next election. Just a prediction, but I may as well put it out there since it was mentioned in the throne speech.

In addition, they talk about a new framework for renewable energy, something that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has been talking about for some time, but I've got to say that when you've got a Market Surveillance Administrator catching a company manipulating the market to boost prices artificially, not just once but for a second time, you have to wonder about whether the government is truly committed to putting consumers first. We just simply aren't seeing it.

A Canada free trade zone. This came out of the blue. I'm not sure where this came from. It's the idea of reducing internal trade barriers. I think that's not a bad idea, but sometimes I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I get the impression that the Premier thinks she's the Prime Minister rather than the Premier of Alberta. If I were Premier of Alberta, I would focus on getting the New West Partnership right because the two most important relationships that we have right now are with our neighbour to the east, Saskatchewan, led by Premier Brad Wall, and our neighbour to the west, led by Premier Christy Clark, and I have to say that those two are fellow travellers on the Conservative side of things. You would think that there should be an amazing partnership between our three provinces to be able to move aside all of the trade barriers that we have that are preventing the free flow of trade and goods across our borders. It seems to me that this is the partnership the Premier should be focusing on getting right, and I have to say that it appears to me that when you read stories about

the relationship between our Premier and some of these others being frosty, I think this is the area that she needs to do a little bit more work on.

The throne speech also bragged about the agreements with teachers and doctors but mentioned nothing about the blind-side hit that's coming to our front-line public-sector unions with new pension legislation that is taking place this fall unilaterally. I have to say that it is not our AUPE front-line workers who are the problem when you're looking at government overspending. As they pointed out when the sunshine list came out showing how many workers are making over a hundred thousand dollars per year, it was only 88 of the 22,000 AUPE workers who were on that sunshine list, and those were scientists. Most of the people who were on that sunshine list were political appointees, senior managers, not the folks who are down in the trenches doing the front-line work.

In addition, they have pointed out as well that 4,000 front-line AUPE workers earn less than \$45,000 a year, so you can imagine how they're feeling when they've been watching the debate in the Legislature this week, to see that the Premier continues to refuse to pay back \$45,000 for a single trip, when that's how much they make in a single year. Now they're being asked to have wage austerity for the next four years. Since the government doesn't seem to even want to acknowledge our front-line workers let alone thank them, let me stand and thank our front-line workers with the AUPE for the incredible work that they're doing on behalf of all Albertans.

So now we have the biggest whopper of all in the budget. The government is going to live within its means and balance the budget. Well, I have to say that when you look at the supplementary estimates that we're going to be debating, albeit there are hundreds of millions, billions of dollars in there because of flood relief, there is also \$700 million of additional spending increases that have nothing to do with the flood relief effort, 700 million additional dollars that this government is asking for, which I find a bit peculiar because in the throne speech they bragged about the fact that they have already had 375 programs reviewed, that they're two-thirds of the way through the results-based budgeting process, and they're asking for \$700 million more.

3:20

Wasn't the whole purpose of the results-based budgeting process to find efficiencies in certain places so that the money could be moved from low-priority areas to high-priority areas? If that's the case and they are continuing to ask for more money, having gone two-thirds through that budgeting process, I would have to say that results-based budgeting is not something you should be touting as a success. It's actually turning out to be a pretty big failure.

The other thing that we're seeing as well is this strange action that the government is taking to try to pretend that they're saving more. But they're not really saving more; they're saving through borrowing. They're borrowing to save money so that they can spend more money on corporate welfare programs through the various different endowment funds that they're creating. We as a party do not support subsidies to private corporations, and we'll be watching the kind of decisions the government makes in how they allocate these dollars. We saw through the years of late 1980s and the early 1990s, before Mr. Klein came in and fixed things, that there were billions of taxpayers' dollars wasted on failed diversification efforts. I fear that the government has started us down a track of taking a very similar flawed approach. On balance I'd have to say that the throne speech offered Albertans little assurance that the Premier's government has Albertans' best

interests at heart. It gave no indication of a change in approach. The speech was very disappointing in many ways.

To truly understand this throne speech, we should step back to the 2012 throne speech. We've now had two years to see whether or not any of the high ideals actually translate into meaningful government action. There are a couple of things that I think indicate whether or not we should have some optimism in looking at the issues that are raised in this throne speech. In the 2012 speech this government promised to "deliver and fulfill a clear, focused, target-driven mandate." Albertans were supposed to know where the province was headed and how much progress was being made. This government claimed that it would be true to its promises. You know, I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I can't think of a single promise that this government has kept let alone being true to its promises more generally. We were told that the government would "bring new fiscal discipline to budgets so they deliver the outcomes Albertans want in a financially sensible way." The government bragged about its fiscally conservative beliefs.

Well, here we are today, two years later, and we have an absolute fiscal mess. I have to tell you that we had to go to the extreme measure of holding a press conference to give the media a tutorial on how to interpret the government's budget numbers. When you cannot actually have on budget day any kind of consistency from opposition parties or advocacy groups or any kind of commentator even being able to figure out what the debt or deficit number is, that's not a problem with the analysis; that's a problem with the way the government is presenting the books. We had to go through and talk about what an operating surplus is versus what a consolidated operating surplus or deficit is because the government's definition of a consolidated surplus or deficit is different than what accountants would look at as a consolidated surplus or deficit.

We also know that it's impossible to say that you're running a surplus and then still take out billions of dollars worth of debt. This is what puts the lie to the argument that the government is putting forward. We are going to be racking up billions of dollars worth of additional debt. We are going to have hundreds of millions of dollars in additional interest charges. I think this is important. I'm not sure if the government is thinking about the way in which debt and finance charges impact their ability to deliver on their operational promises. If we follow down the track that the government outlined in last year's budget, we'd be looking at \$17 billion worth of debt by 2016, \$600 million worth of finance charges. Where are those dollars going to come from?

Let's remember last year: \$147 million they gutted out of postsecondary because they were looking, scrambling to try to find ways to make their deficit look less bad than it was; \$42 million cut out of persons with developmental disabilities programs, causing absolute chaos and near devastation on the front lines of providing services for our most vulnerable. Those are in combination less than \$200 million. Where's this government going to come up with \$600 million to pay those finance charges? That, I think, is the aspect that they're not considering when they try to argue to Albertans that borrowing billions of dollars has no additional cost. It has a massive cost, and it pulls dollars away from the things that Albertans value in being able to hire front-line teachers, nurses, correctional officers, social workers, and so on.

We were also told in that throne speech in 2012 that the new Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation would usher in a new era of transparency and accountability. There would be a new Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, whistle-blower legislation, and world-

class conflict-of-interest legislation. Well, instead, what we've seen is a FOIP review act that has a process that is the most flawed review process in Alberta history. Normally you actually have members of the opposition involved in that process. They're choosing not to do that this time. Our whistle-blower protection legislation is classic Orwellian doublespeak. What we've seen in practice is that its main function is to protect the government from whistle-blowers.

We saw this when my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake went public with the whistle-blower who found that there was \$10 million worth of new computers stuffed into a storage room for a year and a half and becoming obsolete rather than being deployed by Alberta Health Services. These are the kinds of things that we need to have come forward so that we can find some of the solutions to these problems. But it's very clear that that's a dramatic example of how our whistle-blower legislation just isn't working.

Instead of world-class conflicts of interest legislation, this Premier has had to deal with some of the most serious conflicts of interest allegations in Alberta history, including one where she has been at the centre. This government's record on its promises is nothing to be proud of. The program this government delivered over the last two years from the last throne speech was not clear, it was not focused, and it was not target driven.

I have already talked about some of the promises in this throne speech, some of the concerns that we have with health care. We've got incredible concerns that they have made no practical movements on being able to correct the problems that we see in health care, particularly in seniors' care. We keep getting told that issues are going to be addressed, yet the 100-kilometre rule still exists, we still have seniors who are getting only one bath a week, we still have seniors who are not being fed home-cooked meals, and we still have instances of seniors suffering neglect, in the case of some suffering neglect to the point of death and not actually seeing any mechanism for being able to be redressed with their family.

Let me just finish by saying that the one thing the speech made clear was that more debt is in Alberta's future, and there's absolutely no plan to repay any of it. The 2012 throne speech promised fiscal discipline and fiscal conservatism. Instead, we got three budgets which even the Auditor General had a hard time deciphering. For a government that claims to be investing so much in future generations, they seem to be more content than ever to saddle those future generations with billions in new debt. I think the Finance minister has said that rather than buy himself a new pair of shoes, he chose to buy his grandkids new pairs of shoes. I suppose that's pretty appropriate because it's going to be his grandkids who are going to have to pay back the debt that he's borrowing on their behalf today. I think it's shameful.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Albertans were hoping that in this throne speech they would see some humility, they would see some leadership from this Premier, and they would see a government that desperately needs a change. Instead, they got a laundry list of vague promises and an uninspiring indication that the status quo will continue. This throne speech will not put this government on track to recapturing the trust of Albertans. It will not solve the big problems that Albertans want the government to act on. It has no real solutions to our finances, to health care, to education, or on dealing with the pressing needs of our municipalities. I'm afraid that most Albertans will agree with me that despite the best intentions expressed in this throne speech, this is a government that clearly just can't deliver.

With that, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:30 Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Hon. members, before we commence consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to review briefly the Standing Orders governing the speaking rotation. As you know, yesterday the Assembly approved amendments to the Standing Orders that impact the prescribed rotation for supplementary supply consideration. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the fourth party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.

During the above rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes.

The amendments to the standing orders that were approved yesterday by the House now provide that the above rotation continues to the extent possible for the time remaining. However, the speaking times are limited to five minutes as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

Government Motion 6, approved by the Assembly yesterday, provides for six hours of consideration for supplementary supply. Accordingly, this time frame allows for another complete rotation of the above-noted time allotments. For the balance of the time remaining the chair will recognize members in accordance with the prescribed rotation, but the time allotments will revert to five minutes for the member, followed by five minutes by the member of Executive Council.

The chair appreciates that this is a new procedure, so if members have questions as to when their caucus will be called in the rotation, please approach the table or send a note to the chair.

We will now proceed to the estimates.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2013-14, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2013-14 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund.

When passed, these estimates will authorize increases of \$2,014,000,000 in voted operational funding, \$223.2 million in voted capital funding, and \$10.7 million in voted financial transactions funding for the government. The estimates are consistent

with the amended 2013-14 fiscal plan presented in the appendix and will authorize additional funding for 13 departments: Aboriginal Relations; Culture; Education; Energy; Environment and Sustainable Resource Development; Executive Council; Health; Human Services; Infrastructure; Municipal Affairs; Service Alberta; Tourism, Parks and Recreation; and Transportation.

The requested funding includes a little over \$1.3 billion for flood recovery activities by 11 of the 13 departments involved, and the ministers responsible for these departments will be pleased to answer any questions from the members of this House or their designates, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Just before you proceed, hon. member, in the past we have either had the members speak their full 10 minutes and then the response is a full 10 minutes or you can choose to go back and forth for the 20-minute period. Can you let us know which way you would like at this time, please?

Mr. Anderson: I think we'd like to go back and forth, and I don't think we'll be spending an overly large amount of time.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: All right, Madam Chair. See, I got that on the first try. We'll note that.

The first 2013-14 supplementary supply estimates, back in November, increased operational spending by \$625 million and capital by \$140 million. This second supplementary supply will increase operational spending by over \$2 billion and capital spending by \$223 million.

Much but not all of the increase that we can see in here is due to the 2013 Alberta flooding. According to the updated fiscal plan operational spending is up about \$700 million in nonflood operational spending. It is clarified further on in the document that when you take away federal flood money, revenues this year will top \$42 billion. That's \$3.3 billion more than budget and \$2.5 billion more than our previous provincial record of 39 and a half billion dollars, set in the Premier's first year.

The government on the other side is clapping for those huge revenues, which is dumbfounding because despite these record revenues, Madam Chair, this government is unable, or I would say unwilling, to balance the budget. That's an embarrassment. That's what that is.

I do not understand, and we would like to understand from the ministers why, when you've gone through this results-based budgeting process that you keep harkening to, you have been unable to find enough efficiencies that you don't need to ask for more non flood-related money, why you could not find efficiencies in other areas to mitigate the \$700 billion ask. We understand in here that, for example, in education we need \$70 million more for unexpected enrolment. Obviously, that needs to be paid. There's no doubt. But why could we not find efficiencies in other areas of government to offset that requirement?

Why could we not find \$34 million for the start-up costs associated with the Alberta Energy Regulator? How could we not have looked at other efficiencies in government to find that amount so that we're not here having to ask the taxpayer for more money?

We've given in our alternative budget, which we presented to the President of Treasury Board, many examples of where money could be saved. We would never expect him to follow all of our advice, obviously, but certainly there are some savings there that

could be used to offset the amounts, the need to borrow another \$700 million.

Although we're not going to take issue, I don't think, with any of the specific line items in these supplementary estimates in Bill 2 here, it's still very frustrating that we have to do this. Why isn't the results-based budgeting process working? How can we smash our provincial revenue record and still be borrowing \$3.7 billion this year to build capital? Why can we not pay our bills even in these best of times, revenue-wise?

Madam Chair, if we can't get it right now – I mean, there might be another couple of years in front of us where, you know, we have high oil and gas royalties, in excess of \$100 a barrel and so forth for oil, et cetera, et cetera. I hope so. But, boy, we're sure putting ourselves in a heck of a pickle here if revenues go south at all at this point. That's really disconcerting for me as a father of four and for many Albertans and, I'm sure, many parents in this room, the effect that that will have on our kids' future if we don't get our spending under control and have a sustainable budget.

Asking for \$700 million of non flood-related spending in a record revenue year: it's just not appropriate. We shouldn't be doing it, but we have to because most of these items in here are not really optional. I mean, you really do have to. These are legitimate expenses. It's just that it's too bad that savings couldn't be found. That's really my critique or problem with this process.

3:40

I will say that I'm completely supportive of what the government asks with regard to the flood-related spending and rebuilds. There are, of course, some issues on the education file that were a little bit questionable with some of the capital that was used in the Premier's riding, whether that was really necessary, but that debate has already taken place, so I won't dwell on it here. Other than that, most of the flood-related spending in here seems to be appropriate.

With that, I will – now, how does this work? A point of clarification: if it goes back, can I have another member of the caucus stand up within our time, or do we have to wait it through?

The Deputy Chair: No.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Those are my questions, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. member talks about balancing the budget, and he mentioned yesterday in one of his speeches about the consolidated balancing. I know he was referring perhaps to the way the federal government might balance their budget. Hon. member, I'm assuming that's probably what you're chatting about or perhaps the B.C. government – maybe that's the one – or Saskatchewan, which actually had qualified statements prepared by their Auditor General. Not a very good thing to have happen to you.

I'm curious, Madam Chair, if the hon. member will criticize Mr. Flaherty when he comes out with a balanced budget, which he intends to do, which includes a significant amount of borrowing within his balance sheet in his time. I'm curious whether he will stand up in this House and claim that the federal Conservative government is misleading the people of Canada and Alberta with their financial statements because they're not really balanced. I'm curious about that because I've been in consultation with some of the other Finance ministers across the country about where we're all at in terms of our finances.

I would point the hon. member to page 75 of the supplementary estimates document, which shows that we have indeed done considerably better this year than what we had put out in our budget last year. In fact, in my third-quarter estimate we did actually foreshadow what was in the supplementary estimates. We prepared a consolidated statement of the fiscal plan, which shows that rather than having a deficit in the net assets or consolidated financial statements of \$1.97 billion, which was what was in the budget previously, we're going to end up probably around the \$335 million mark. As well, we're going to have a considerable amount more in our contingency account at the end of this year than what was budgeted because, Madam Chair, we didn't budget for the flood. We didn't budget for the largest economic disaster this country has ever seen. Yet because of those high revenues and because of the fact that we had money in the contingency account, we were able to manage what turned out to be a very significant hit to our operating budget and now a very significant hit to the capital plan.

Do you know what, Madam Chair? We're showing Albertans how we're going to pay for our capital plan. We're actually putting it on paper and putting it in financial documents so people can understand where the money is coming to and from. You know, the suggestion from across the way was that there was some document that the Wildrose Alliance had put out there that showed something like a budget or balance sheet. I haven't seen it, but I would love to. I would really like to see where they're going to come up with \$4.8 billion a year for the next 10 years without going to savings – maybe that's what they're going to do – or without raising taxes or without cutting education, health care, human services, the environment, any of the departments that are large enough. Well, health care, obviously, would be the big one. They would have to probably take a couple of billion dollars out of health care, which would be an interesting thing for Albertans to understand where they really stand.

Madam Chair, he's right. This is a very significant amount of money, and we had a very significant event. The floods in 2013 were a \$6 billion event that this province was able to manage and still come out of with being the only jurisdiction that has no net debt, that has net assets. In fact, it has net assets of some \$44 billion. Net assets: that's our net worth. There isn't a province in Canada that can stand in their Legislature and say that except this one.

Madam Chair, I look forward to tomorrow because I think the hon. members opposite will be happy about the plans that we're going to be putting in place. But tonight is not about tomorrow. This afternoon is not about tomorrow. This afternoon is about the supply estimates.

I think I've answered some of the general questions that the hon. member had. My understanding of what we were going to do, hon. member: from the listing – we have the ministers here – if you'd like to maybe go through each one, and you can do the questions back and forth like we've done in the past. Is that the way you want to?

Mr. Anderson: Sure.

Mr. Horner: Okay. I will do the Energy estimates, when we get to that, I guess, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy.

But just as another piece of information that I think is important to get on the record, there is \$1.3 billion worth of flood-related requests in the \$2 billion. There are also things like \$160 million worth of energy costs for marketing oil. We're actually not asking for more money. We're changing the way we account for it. We're putting it separated so you can actually see what the revenue is

and the cost of the transportation. It's an accounting change. It's not asking for new money, as the hon. member might suggest.

There are legitimately new money requests in here because our population grew by 105,000 people last year. We had a lot of people move into our province, and they came, Madam Chair, why? Because we've got the jobs. We created 70,000 jobs last year, the most in all of Canada. That meant that we had to do some other things, and we did have increases in the Education components, obviously in health care, in Human Services, all of those components where we are going to be dealing with a larger population because of the volume.

Outside of the flood, the \$1.3 billion, outside of the energy accounting change of the \$157 million or \$160 million, there were, yes, increases to the budget because we had the largest increase in our population that this province has seen, and we needed to adjust to it. Thank God that we had the financial resources to do that without borrowing for operating, because that's what we did, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: You just heard the minister's strategy for balancing the budget: thank God. That's the strategy right there. I'm not saying that that shouldn't be one of the arrows in the quiver, but maybe we should rely on a little bit of common sense and not just divine intervention to help us balance our budget, Mr. Minister.

I think that the minister attempted to answer as best he could. He is, of course, restricted by the facts, so it's difficult for him, but I have no further questions at this time on this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members from the loyal opposition party? Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, would you like to go back and forth, or do you want to talk for 10 minutes?

Mr. Anglin: I'll just take the 10 minutes, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: You're going to take the 10 minutes? Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: It's easier that way, and hopefully I don't even have to take up the full 10 minutes. I just have some questions, and I'm hoping the ministers can answer the questions.

There is a significant amount of money in this supplementary that clearly has to do with the whole debacle with the flood, and I fully understand that. It is reasonable to presume, as the minister just said, that we didn't budget for the flood, nor can you. With an event of that magnitude, if that becomes a regular item, then we have to rethink how we're going to live in this province. But the fact is that it does happen, and we have to deal with it.

The question I have is: with a lot of the money that was allocated to the disaster recovery and to some of the municipal flood readiness, where are we? What I don't get from the report – I just get the total amount – is: how was it spent to prepare for us, particularly, going into the next budget? Clearly, I think the minister knows. I'm going to use Sundre as my example because I have intimate knowledge of this one community, but it still applies to all the other communities in these floodways, whether it's Drumheller, whether it's High River.

3:50

Sundre is the community where I have my office, it's where I have very good relations with members of the community, and it

is a community in imminent threat of flooding should it happen again this spring. I can venture to say that it will happen in one form or another. The key is: how are we spending that money, and are we doing the right thing? Does that dovetail with our future plans that will be coming up?

A couple of questions I really have. I believe there were some spurs that were built for some flood mitigation, and that would be probably under the heading of some sort of erosion control or bank control. I have seen that in government reports.

The other is dealing with spurs. Clearly, if we're going to do flood mitigation, we are going to do some work with the erosion of the banks, we are going to be building spurs, and we have to also be thinking about dredging. There was money spent on dredging both in I believe Canmore and High River, but there was no money spent on dredging in Sundre unless the minister can correct me on that. I'm pretty sure that no money has been spent on dredging in Sundre.

The key here is this. Where are we with the money that we've spent? I know there's been money allocated. It's in here somewhere. It's been allocated to do some additional studies. I believe the county of Mountain View got an allocation of money for the Sundre area dealing with the headwaters of the Red Deer River, which, by the way, will affect Red Deer, which will affect Drumheller and all the communities downriver. If we take care of the headwaters, we do sort of get ahead of the curve a little bit, helping all those other communities downriver in dealing with the flood. The question is: how much of this money has been allocated both from ESRD and under Municipal Affairs? I'm not clear where the overlap on some of the money spent occurs, but each shares in the responsibility as it falls under their jurisdiction.

What I want to have, hopefully, a clearer understanding of, particularly as it relates to dredging, is that this is an area that I think is absolutely paramount to the flood mitigation for the community of Sundre. They have long bridges that have a very shallow riverbed going underneath them, and of course when that river rose, as the Minister of Transportation understands, we lost some bridges here. I believe that that money would be in the allocation or in the supplementary dealing with Transportation and Infrastructure as we repaired those bridges. What we don't want to do is have to repair those bridges again. I think we can all agree on that.

What I'm really looking for is sort of connecting the dots, connecting the dots from the previous supplementary to this supplementary, which is now dealing with a lot of issues as we move forward into our budget, and how we're going to connect the dots here. If the minister or ministers, because it does criss-cross ministries here, could give an explanation of how much of these monies were on flood mitigation, particularly relative to the high-risk communities – specifically, I'm interested in Sundre – that deal with berms and spurs, the two items, the third item being dredging. It is clear from the people who live in the community that if we take some very economic measures, like cleaning the debris out of the river north of Sundre, we could actually save a tremendous amount of money if the river were to pass unimpeded.

It is when trees fall into the river and act as, you know, nature's own dams that causes the river to cut a new path. The minister knows, after his visit, that the Red Deer River upriver from Sundre has moved almost a complete mile from its previous riverbed. It does have that ability to change and shift just because – and I refer to it as a gravel delta – it is very wide. The river can shift easily from one channel to another, depending on just a small blockage, whether it be trees or any other type of debris that would form.

What every study has confirmed to this point is that there needs to be a short-term plan to deal with what's coming up this spring,

there needs to be a long-term plan that needs to fit into, hopefully, what we've spent so far, and that plan has to take in three items: berms, spurs, and dredging. Without this I'm not sure how we can get a plan to work. Really, the two ministers that I'm focused on are the Minister of Environment and SRD and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. If they could connect the dots for me, I would appreciate that.

I will tell you this. The money that you spend and the money that you've spent here has a tremendous impact on saving us money in the future. As the Minister of Finance just stated, you did not plan for the flood; you could not have planned for a flood of that magnitude. But what we can do is plan on the prevention so that we don't have to suffer something of this magnitude again. That's the key. I want to make sure that the money that we did spend and the money that we're going to spend is doing exactly what we need to do so that we never have to endure a disaster of this magnitude.

The disaster affected lives, it affected property, and it affected the economies of these communities. It killed the economy when it destroyed those small businesses. It took a long time to start to rebuild these communities, and they may never be the same again. Sundre doesn't want to go through this once again. This is a serious issue dealing with the one community. It's a serious issue dealing with every community that faces this every spring. It is not something that we can minimize or marginalize. It is something we have to take very seriously.

Most importantly, in these dollars that we spend, what is dealing with planning versus what is dealing with action? Most of these communities have seen document after document dealing with planning, the community of Sundre being one. We've done multiple studies. What we're looking for is committing to action and taking action. If the minister could explain what action has been taken physically with the money that's been spent, what actions remain that have been identified, and how this goes from this point to the next point, that would be extremely helpful to the citizens of Sundre. I believe the mayor and council are up here this week for the breakfast, and they certainly would like to hear some good news on what the game plan is. So what's been done, what needs to be done, and what, really, is the long-term plan?

Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hopefully, the minister can kind of connect the dots for me.

The Deputy Chair: There are now 10 minutes available for any member of Executive Council to respond. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, I'll certainly attempt to connect the dots. Sometimes the dots may not be completely connectable, but I'll do my best.

You know, these are important questions that the hon. member has raised, and I do appreciate the comments in general from the hon. Member for Airdrie in terms of the support for the work that this government has done. We appreciate that support and appreciate the encouragement that we're all providing to ensure that we support southern Albertans who've been through this catastrophic event.

The hon. member was asking, largely, about mitigation measures that are being done in Sundre. As he well knows, I was in Sundre on the 7th of February. I met with representatives of Mountain View county and the town of Sundre. We had very, very constructive discussions. There are two or three different aspects there. We work very closely with the municipal governments and work with them to meet their needs as they define them, supported, obviously, by engineering work that has to be done. We

want to do the right things, not the quick things. We want to ensure that we build up so that communities are prepared should there be a spring flush or a high flood anything at all like there was last year.

The hon. member called it dredging. Really, it's scalping. Removal of the rocks and debris in the river course tends to happen without actually going into the water, so it tends not to be dredging but scalping out the gravel and the debris and the rocks that have been deposited there by high water. That's really an initiative led by the municipality if they see that that is something that needs to be done. They work with their engineers. We help them fund that work.

4:00

You know, we have a lot of mitigation work being done around southern Alberta, that's already started, where equipment is out on the road already, getting ready to do this work. A lot of it will be done over the next month or two months. Many communities are preparing to be ready by the middle of May so that they have all of the berms – the berms and spurs, as the hon. member calls them – in place well in advance of where we would normally expect there to be a risk of further flooding.

Actually, we've allocated – you can see the numbers in the plan – very substantial resources to the mitigation across the province. Some of those projects are still being costed because the engineering work is still under way, so the final cost we'll see at the end of the day. But we've allocated very substantial resources to make sure that we're ready, that these communities are protected, that the berms are built, and that they're built in time. That's obviously what we're doing in every single community that's been affected. We're working with the reeves and the mayors and the councils of all of these communities.

Obviously, there's erosion control along the sides of the rivers as well and on the edge of important infrastructure like bridges. The member referred to the bridge in Sundre. There's an awful lot of work that is going on. You'll see that there are trucks travelling around this province loaded down with big rocks that are, you know, hardening the sides of many rivers in order to prepare for the future.

The mitigation initiatives throughout the major watersheds that were affected last year: some mitigation projects can be done this spring. Those are the smaller ones. Those are the rock barriers along the sides of rivers. Some will take much longer. Some will be multiyear projects, undoubtedly. But we expect to be in a position before too long to address both short-term and long-term needs for these communities in order to protect them. The goal is to protect Albertans and ensure that communities are protected from future floods.

I know that that doesn't answer in a great deal of detail. If the hon. member – and I say the same to any of my colleagues on all sides of the House – has specific suggestions or specific projects that they think perhaps a community is not seeing or that they're not hearing back on in time because of the volume of projects going on, I'm happy to entertain a conversation to explore that and to work with MLAs and with the communities, the municipal leaders, whether of counties or towns or cities or villages, in order to make sure that we help everybody be ready for a flood should there be that possibility this spring.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition that would like to speak?

Seeing none, we'll move on to the second. This is 20 minutes that you can take. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, did you want to go back and forth, or do you want to take your 10 minutes?

Mr. Hehr: Well, we'll see what we're going to do here. Yeah, we'll go back and forth. I'm going to rattle a little bit, and then hopefully they'll rattle a little bit. We'll sort of go by their – I don't think anyone is going to get their shirt in knot about too much of what I'm going to do. Does that sound fair?

The Deputy Chair: Certainly, hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: All right. There we go. Well, you know, it's an honour and privilege to speak to supplementary supply estimates, to offer a few comments and, hopefully, direct a few questions towards what has sort of gone on here over the course of the last year.

It's always sort of interesting when you get a chance to see the Minister of Finance as well as the Wildrose Finance critic offer their various solutions to today's problems and various interpretations of what has or has not transpired in this province. It's really sort of a neat experience. First off, you have parties that, in my view, essentially believe in the same thing. They believe in the same fiscal structure, so how can you really do things differently? The other thing is the viewpoints of the past, where the Minister of Finance says: what a glorious record the Progressive Conservative Party has had in terms of managing our finances.

Here is where I will agree with the hon. Finance minister or the Finance critic of the Wildrose. When you look at that *Economist* article that was written in the *Economist* some months ago, that was going through jurisdictions positively and negatively as to how countries or regions have dealt with their oil wealth, they single out Alberta for having abjectly failed in its obligation to save this oil wealth for the future. They say that we've run it essentially like a tinpot despot would, you know, with no idea or no clue on what to do with the oil wealth. So on that the Wildrose Finance critic is correct although on other things I'm not so certain.

In any event, turning to the flood, it looks like much of these expenses were related to the flood as well as to regular population growth exercises, that really should be funded as a matter of course. My comments on the flood are, one, like the comments from the last speaker, that we have had to mitigate for damage.

I will also put a bug in the Minister of Municipal Affairs' ear because I believe he's the minister in charge. Although the federal government said that they would look at somewhat of a national flood insurance program, it was really kind of a lukewarm response that I saw out of the federal budget. In my view, if the federal government doesn't get onto this program pretty quickly, the Alberta government should seriously consider moving ahead with its own provincial flood insurance program. In my view, this could be accomplished given the fact that we're headed for five million people. Also, it would be prudent in that 57 per cent of the natural disasters that have occurred, that have tapped into the national program, have emanated from Alberta. So it would be very important for us to move along that path should the federal government forgo the opportunity to provide what I think would be in this nation's and definitely in this province's best interests.

Moving on to some specific questions, I notice that the Minister of Education is here, and possibly I could direct them there. Some supplementary amounts were unutilized by his department. So I'm just looking at the operational program spending, operational support for public and separate schools, and I believe that says that it's almost \$63 million. Is that primarily due just to population

growth and strictly per-pupil grants? Would he have a number of how many extra students that would have covered?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yes, Madam Chair. That's accurate. The member is right. The increase in the operational grants to school boards is primarily and almost exclusively for the enrolment growth that was unexpected or beyond our forecasts. In total about 18,000 students were added to the school system last year, up from about 600,000 the previous year.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Are the numbers and the increases to accredited private schools and accredited private early school service operators the same?

Mr. J. Johnson: Yep. The total number is just over \$60 million, and about \$2 million of that is to accredited private schools and about \$2 million as well to accredited private early childhood service operators. The rest would have been to the public schools.

4:10

Mr. Hehr: On the capital projects it says that you got some money for "35 new schools and modernizations re-profiled to 2013-14 due to project delays in 2012-13." Just to confirm, these were not any of the new schools or modernizations promised by your political party in the last provincial election, were they?

Mr. J. Johnson: No. This is just cash flow, basically money that didn't get spent from the last year, like you said, due to projects where the money is just not out the door because they were delayed in one sense or another or other reasons. But the money was there, approved for budgeted schools, and it was just the cash flow of the projects.

Mr. Hehr: Now, I don't see it specifically mentioned here, but there were some spending announcements after the flood in regard to education, in particular the rebuilding of Elbow Park school. I believe the ministry and the government of the day earmarked \$10 million for the building of Elbow Park school. Is that in this supplementary estimate here?

Mr. J. Johnson: Some of that is, and then a good part of that is with all the flood dollars that we had in some of the other supplementary estimates. I believe there's about \$20 million out of here for the flood recovery. Part of that is for the modular classrooms, not just at Elbow Park but also at Notre Dame and Senator Riley and in High River. The Sprung structure: about \$650,000 for that. That was at Elbow Park, that temporary gym structure that we put up there.

Mr. Hehr: Was any of this earmarked for the actual reconstruction of the old school?

Mr. J. Johnson: No, they're not.

Mr. Hehr: When will that money be forthcoming?

Mr. J. Johnson: That's in upcoming years.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

I think those are all my questions, Madam Chair, and I thank the hon. member for answering them.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the fourth party. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we've just started another 20-minute block for you. Would you like to do 10 minutes and 10 minutes or back and forth?

Ms Notley: Well, I'm still kind of rushing through things right here. I think I will try 10 minutes, but I'll ask questions in the course of it and then ask for answers back, I guess. We will see. Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Notley: What's that? [interjections] Yeah. I don't know. We'll see. I'm just sort of going through this. This is very off the cuff. Let me just say that.

I guess one thing I do need to point out is that these documents didn't reach our office until this morning. They were provided to the MLAs in the House yesterday. Our staff had made inquiries to get these documents provided to our office last evening so that they could do what they often do, which is work late into the evening, going through this stuff. Those documents were not provided and didn't arrive in our offices till this morning. I will say that we are a bit frustrated by that process, and I hope that that will not be repeated with additional stuff going forward.

We're looking at a fairly significant increase, and I guess I have a few questions around . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt you, but the noise level is getting pretty high here.

Could I ask all the members to please keep the noise level down? If you have a serious discussion, you can take it out into the outer rooms. Thank you very much.

Ms Notley: I'll be directing my questions and comments to Health, Human Services, Advanced Education, and Energy, and I think that's mostly where my questions and comments will be focused. I'm hoping that somebody will answer in the event that the minister of that particular area is not here, that somebody else will answer in their stead.

I guess we might as well start, then, with Innovation and Advanced Education. I am assuming that the \$53 million that we're putting in there is the one-third restoration of the \$147 million cut that was announced in April. Is that correct? Okay. I guess I said that I was going to go 10 minutes, so that's my first question. Is that what that is?

Then my question is: how did we come up with that \$53 million number? I'm sure, as members on the other side know and people in the public know, our position was that the \$147 million claw-away from the ministry of advanced education was not a positive development, but I am very curious as to how the ministry came up with the \$53 million that went back into it. What were their criteria? How does that particular number fix the multiplicity of problems that we've seen develop as a result of that \$147 million cut?

Today I joined with some university staff-worker unions to call on the government, of course, to complete the restoration of the \$147 million that they cut. So we've got the \$53 million here. We've got the other \$100 million that also needs to go back in there along with the increases that were promised by the government to Albertans, frankly, in the last election, which was regular, predictable, stable funding at the rate of about 2 per cent per year over three years. That was actually what was promised in the election. Instead, we got a \$147 million cut, and then we got a \$53

million return. So my question is: how is that \$53 million calculated?

I'm wondering if part of that calculation relates to what I've started referring to somewhat casually as a chaos premium or a chaos tax. I'm sure the minister of advanced education will have seen the comprehensive institutional report that was put out by the University of Alberta or at least appended to its minutes in January, which talked at great length about the level of chaos and the level of cost incurred within the institution, not by simply losing the money and having to cut those services but also the insecurity and the chaos that those cuts caused and the additional cost that that created and the lost opportunity that that created as a result of the rather extensive damage to their reputation and the contracts which suddenly were cancelled and the high-level academics and students that they had hoped to attract to the university who then left because they perceived that the postsecondary system in Alberta was under attack, all of that stuff.

My question is: what does that \$53 million that we are putting back in do? How does it work in relation to the \$147 million that was cut in April?

Of course, I take this opportunity to say again that I certainly hope that the government, with its new-found wealth, might reconsider the commercialization and Americanization of our postsecondary system plan that they appear to be on and, instead, focus on developing a postsecondary system that actually is able to serve Albertans and serve as an opportunity for people to improve their quality of life and their income-earning potential over time, which is not what's happening right now as much as it could be. So those are my comments about the additional money going into advanced education.

Now, I do know that one of the ministers here was at one point responsible for the issue of PDD. I'm not sure if he still is or if he's been moved around now, so I apologize for not remembering everyone's roles, but hopefully someone can answer this question. We see in Human Services an additional \$81 million, and I would like to know what that's for. We were told that the roughly \$40 million that was planned to be taken from PDD would not be taken, so I'm assuming that that's part of the money that's in that \$81 million. That is my question. Is that what's in the \$81 million?

My other question is: what's the other money? I know that certainly historically it's often been the case that the government has come in here and made fairly major cuts to income support under the sort of somewhat delusional assumption that as the economy improves, those at the lowest end of the economy will just improve as sort of a percentage of GDP growth. We know that that's not happening, that the level of inequality in this province is in fact growing, and that every time we recover from a boom, the lowest sector of the population, or the population that's most at risk, does not actually recover with the rest of the population. So we have this cycle of boom-bust, but the difference between those benefiting from the booms and those who are not grows each time.

4:20

That's significant. What it means is that when the government projects that it can cut \$50 million from income support, really, in fact, that's probably not a wise projection. Just because the economy is picking up does not mean that income support is going to be reduced accordingly. That's what I've found in the past, that it's often been the case that the government has come in and said, "We're going to be able to knock all these people off income support," and then, lo and behold, in supplementary supply we're asking for that money back. We have set up administrative processes that make it absolutely almost impossible for people to get

income support because of the bureaucratic labyrinth that they must negotiate in order to meet a social worker, get the forms filled out, and receive the funds. It becomes increasingly challenging every year. Notwithstanding that, some real sort of strong-hearted people will manage to make their way through it or in many cases find advocates who will help them so that, in fact, they do continue to receive these benefits.

I'm wondering if that's the other portion of the money that is going back into Human Services. I think it's important. I'd like to make the point, of course, that the throne speech said absolutely not a single, solitary word about the Premier's at the time profoundly cynical commitment to end child poverty in five years and then ignoring the issue for the next two years.

That being said, this issue of income support is absolutely fundamentally linked to it. Children are not poor in isolation, and children do not become members of the middle class while their family is otherwise living on \$700 a month in substandard housing. Frankly, the access to income support that is required by families that are at risk, where children are living in poverty, is very important.

I certainly hope that we are increasing income support. Frankly, we need to increase levels of income support. I challenge anybody on that side of the House to raise a family of two and feed them and live in safe and secure and non bedbug-infested accommodations in either Edmonton or Calgary for under a thousand dollars a month, which is currently what they're being asked to do in many cases. That's just a little aside.

That being said, I'm wanting to know more details around what the increased money going to Human Services is for. Alternatively, was that additional money that went out with the money cards during the flood? Maybe that was it, too. I don't know.

Another question relates to energy. I see that we're looking at about \$35 million for the AER.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's going to come, apparently, as a complete surprise to this hon. member that you just can't simply raise every budget in every department in every year. From time to time there will be difficult decisions that have to be taken. You heard members opposite in another opposition party taking quite the opposite view to that which you did, which had us cutting significantly more out of our budget. So we did indeed make some difficult decisions, and one of them was cuts to operating grants, a \$147 million reduction to postsecondary institution operating grants last year.

We did, however, at that time recognize that there could be or would be increased enrolment pressures, and we promised that if conditions improved during the year, we would address those enrolment pressures. Indeed, conditions did improve during the year, so we are now looking at a \$53 million increase to address enrolment pressures.

Now, for the hon. member to suggest that this is somehow a chaos premium, as she said it was, is facetious and somewhat insulting. I can assure her that members of staff and the minister himself worked with institutions to determine what their pressures were and came up with an appropriate funding level. If that truly is the low regard with which that hon. member holds her fellow duly elected MLA members of this Assembly, then I might suggest that she find another line of work, because this one isn't going to be a very happy or productive one for her.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Madam Chair. In the absence of anybody else here to answer the question with respect to Energy and given that I have some passing familiarity with the question, I'm happy to try and be helpful although perhaps not as definitive as one of my colleagues might have been.

The hon. member has asked about the \$34.3 million with respect to energy regulation. That is to help with the initial stand-up of the Alberta Energy Regulator. It relates to investments that were required both from a timing of capital availability perspective and also from the perspective of investments like technology investments that needed to be made to accommodate the single regulator taking on the responsibility not just for the six energy statutes but also the four environmental statutes as well. So it's really one-time capacity building within the Alberta Energy Regulator, and subsequent to that the regulator is paid for by fees paid by industry through an allocation to industry for services they receive from the Alberta Energy Regulator. I hope that answers the hon. member's questions.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Associate Minister – Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You were asking about \$81.6 million for PDD. Sixty-three million dollars of this for PDD was to slow the pace of change and also to address the higher caseload. Traditionally in PDD the growth is about 2 per cent, and last year we had an unprecedented growth of about 7 per cent, so we took in more than 700 people. Out of the \$63 million approximately \$42 million is to support the PDD transformation. The new contracts with the PDD service providers will help support the individuals to achieve positive outcomes, so that's where the \$42 million is going.

Government also committed, however, at that time to defer signing of the new contracts to give service providers more time to assess individual needs up to an appropriate service level. The key results now, if we look at it today, are that 99 per cent of the service providers have signed on to the new outcome-based contracting, which we were talking about. By slowing the pace down, it gave the individuals the opportunity to adapt to what we were looking for, so now 99 per cent of them have signed onto the new contracts.

The other clarification and change they were looking for is in terms of the supports intensity scale, SIS, program. If we look at it today, 96 per cent of the individuals have SIS assessments done right now, so the system itself is working fantastically well.

PDD also has been working with service providers to create an actual plan which will outline their transformational strategy. I can tell you that 75 per cent of them have completed their transformational plans as well.

Included in the \$63 million, also in the PDD program, was an additional \$21 million to address the caseload. As I alluded to earlier, we had about a 7 to 8 per cent increase in the caseload, approximately 770 people, of which 713 were eligible, so that's why 81 point some million dollars was asked for.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members of Executive Council that would like to address the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona?

There are four minutes left in the block of time.

If you wanted to speak, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you have four minutes.

Mr. Bilous: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. I have four minutes, and then the other side has . . .

The Deputy Chair: That's the total amount of time between you and a minister, so if you want to ask a minister a question, make sure you address that person.

Mr. Bilous: I'll defer to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I prefer for it to cycle back through, so I have a full block of time.

The Deputy Chair: Well, there's another rotation. Then you'll have to wait to the second rotation.

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: So I'll defer to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: You want four minutes?

Ms Notley: I'm wondering if the Minister of Health can begin answering probably a series of questions that we will ask around the money going back in vis-à-vis the proposed change to the seniors' pharmacare plan, what was planned to be coming out of the budget, and what is now going back into the budget. I believe there is an increase there that you're asking for, and it's related to the delayed implementation of that plan. So we'd be looking at: what were the assumptions last year, what were the annualized assumptions, and what are the changed assumptions going forward as a result of the delayed implementation of that plan? I may run out of time, and he may run out of time, but we can start the discussion.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll do my best. I'm sure the hon. member knows that in supplementary estimates and certainly prior to budget day I'm not in a position to discuss any go-forward initiatives with respect to this program or any other program. Obviously, what I can talk about today are the items that are included in supplementary estimates.

With respect to drug and supplemental health benefits, as I think the hon. member would be aware, a portion of the supplementary estimate for Health is related to a delay in the implementation of changes to drug and supplementary programs in the fiscal year that is about to conclude. We had a delay in implementing some of these strategies that resulted in an anticipated savings of \$45 million this year, that was therefore forgone. So these supplementary estimates for my ministry take those forgone savings into account. They obviously create an issue in the current fiscal year, which is addressed.

I can answer in subsequent questions as to how that \$45 million works into the net amount that is requested by the Ministry of Health in supplementary estimates for this current year.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

There is a minute and 13 left, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, I'm just looking through the numbers from last year's budget, and it looked as though the expectation was that just this year, understanding a delayed implementation, we were looking at a savings of about \$60 million. Then, of course, it was

deferred I think in its entirety. As a result, there was an extra \$45 million, that we're asking for now. My question is: what happened to the other \$15 million to \$20 million?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Well, Madam Chair, the difference obviously represents efficiencies which were used to offset other increases in expenditures, notably physician compensation and other aspects of drug and supplementary benefit costs, in particular high-cost drugs for cancer and high-cost drugs for rare and orphan diseases. So the answer is that the net amount was used to offset anticipated overexpenditures in other areas of my budget.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We will now move to the next 20-minute block, set aside for the independent member. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise. This is the first time I've spoken to the supplementary supply estimates.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt, but would you like to take the full 10 minutes, or do you want to go back and forth for the 20?

Mr. Allen: No. I've just prepared some comments to make, and there's perhaps one question in here. I'll just go through my notes and allow the minister to address those if he sees fit, probably the President of Treasury Board.

I guess, you know, technically, I was told that now as a member of the opposition I'm supposed to critique things like this that the government is bringing out. As I went through the supplementary supply estimates, I really had some difficulty finding anything that I disagreed with. As a member of the Treasury Board previously I'm quite familiar with the processes that happen, and I'm quite familiar with having to reallocate items from ministry to ministry and with how that happens. Certainly, we can appreciate the emergencies and unexpected circumstances that can arise. So I'm going to take more of a nonpartisan approach on this and really narrow my comments down to my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, which is the constituency I'm very proud to stand up for and represent here in the House.

Every year we try to budget for disasters and incidents that are out of our control. I know that quite often there's criticism that we didn't budget enough or that we budgeted too much. I understand that there are those occurrences that you just cannot budget for appropriately such as 100-year floods, that happened this year. They just come up, and we're simply not able to prepare adequately for them all the time. But they do offer us an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and ensure that preparations are in place properly should these occurrences ever happen again. Who knows? You never know. Sometimes you just have no idea what you'll be faced with, and the result will be these supplementary supply estimates.

I only really had a quick chance to go through the supplementary supply last night. Looking at the ministries that directly affect my riding, there are quite a few of them. One of the biggest issues in my constituency last year, of course, was the flood. Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was hit in early June of 2013. It was the first to be hit in the province, and it caused literally millions and millions of dollars in damage. It left many with very difficult and challenging living conditions, and we're still trying to recover from those devastating effects.

I note in here as well that Aboriginal Relations will be receiving \$50 million to assist those flood-affected homes in all of the First Nations communities and bring them back up to provincial standards. As we know, whatever affects any community in Alberta affects all of them. Families stretch across the province, and I know that the First Nations in Wood Buffalo will be very pleased to see that their interests are being acknowledged both at home and across the province. Having a safe and livable home is one of the basic necessities of all people. Those that were directly affected by these floods throughout the province need assistance. And help to the First Nations, of course. They were very heavily impacted.

The operational amount of \$2 million needed for the flood recovery program to complete additional studies under the provincial flood hazard identification program is unfortunate. As I've said many times in this House, Fort McMurray does reside in a flood plain, and we're surrounded by the Athabasca River and its tributaries. As such, we're not really impacted by the new identification program. We were identified a long time ago. But as years go on, it's important that other flood plains are identified and that the rest of Alberta learns from the lessons that we in our constituencies are continuously faced with.

Because of our geographical location erosion was a very significant issue this year, and it's a large concern. We have two major rivers and other tributaries that flow into that, and that's where a significant amount of our damage happened during our floods. So \$96 million for restoration that resulted from erosion damage is very welcome as I know that that was, again, our biggest issue. I'm curious how much of that is being made available for our area, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Road construction, of course, which is also so very important, as well as damming and drainage were all directly impacted by the flooding and caused significant damage to these infrastructure necessities in Fort McMurray.

I'm curious as to the estimated \$66 million that was requested for the 2013 Alberta flood recovery by Human Services. How much of that total would have been earmarked for the residents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo? I know that many of these residents of our communities required services, so if the minister would be kind enough to let me know how many of these dollars came to our area, I would appreciate that. It doesn't have to be answered right away today. I can always get that answer later.

I do note that there was \$10 million earmarked for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo through Municipal Affairs. Thank you, Minister – we appreciate that – as well as the Minister of Infrastructure for everything that was done during our disastrous flooding. The citizens that were directly impacted required everything from health care and housing to erosion damage. Municipal Affairs did handle this untenable situation, and I am grateful that they're continuing to do so. I would also have to acknowledge the work of my friend and colleague the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation for his work as the associate minister responsible for the flood mitigation in the DRP in Fort McMurray.

4:40

The stabilization of municipal revenues for lost property taxes is also important for us to ensure the quality of life.

I guess I was also looking through there, and I noticed that for the total for fiscal 2013 to end of March we're showing approximately \$4.3 billion in expense for flooding, but also on the revenue side we've got \$3.1 billion in recovery from the federal government. In our messaging we tend to always focus on the \$4.3 billion that we're spending. I'm going to go out there and tell

people that the net is going to be \$1.2 billion. But, really, in the big scheme of things, we've seen this before, and when we apply for the federal government's funding on there, that can be sometimes tenuous in itself in recovery. So I'm curious if the ministry has any estimate as to when we may be able to expect the federal government to fulfill that commitment. I'm assuming as well that we wouldn't be able to peg that down as to how much of that from the federal government would be coming to my constituency. It would be just in the general revenue mix.

We were severely impacted by the flood. That is the biggest impact in the supplementary supply estimates. Again, I think this was a situation that had not been experienced. It was the most significant natural disaster in Canada's history. I commend the government for the work they did in responding so quickly and assisting those in need. I know we still had some lessons to learn should it happen again, but I know that those actions will now be in place for the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this. So just a couple of questions. If I can leave those with the minister.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a brief comment on the remarks the hon. member made about the Aboriginal Relations supplementary supply estimate. I want to clarify for the House that we estimated \$191 million of spending would happen over the next three years as we help those communities recover. We had put in a supplementary estimate already of \$50 million for the current-year spending.

We are now voting an additional \$20.758 million, which is purely a cash-flow thing. We have to move it forward from next year's spending. The overall estimate of \$191 million still remains firm at this time, but we're going to spend that in this year, so we have to have it voted in this year.

I do want to highlight for the House – and the member went partway there – that this is not a normal thing for Alberta or indeed any province. I'm informed that after a flood that happened some two years ago in one of our sister provinces in our country, there are still First Nations families living in motels. We committed at the start of this that we're not going to do that. We're going to address First Nations housing as we do with all other Albertans, so we undertook this program, and that's what the spending is about. That hon. member can inform his First Nations constituents that that stands for everybody in this province. When you're impacted by disaster, we're there to help.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll take some of the questions and answer what I can at this point, and we'll review the Blues to ensure that we get a written response to the hon. member subsequently on the more detailed questions that he's asked. We can certainly provide him with the details of the pretty substantial assistance that's gone to Fort McMurray as has gone to many other communities around the province.

The hon. member has asked about the federal share, essentially the backstop from the government of Canada on the disaster recovery program. You know, we're all grateful as Canadians to have the support of the people of Canada in an event like this. I've recently taken a look at the historical disaster recovery programs that have taken place in Alberta, and I can say that the government of Canada, while eventually paying up, doesn't always pay up with great alacrity. The Premier asked for the government of

Canada to give us a billion-dollar advance on the costs of this flood. We're fronting that as the province of Alberta, and we expect that to come through.

But there are about a dozen disaster recovery programs that go back as far as 2007, and it's worth as much as a couple of hundred million dollars, in that order of magnitude, that we haven't received payment on yet as well.

We're going to be encouraging the government of Canada to come up with the money a little more quickly this time and to perhaps settle up on their previous obligations. So, by all means, I encourage all members to encourage the government of Canada to support us in this time of need. We're grateful for the support. The cash would be helpful, too.

With respect to the other projects there are DRP, disaster recovery program, files where people have received assistance. In the order of magnitude of \$20 million was set aside just in the supplementary estimates from November and this set of supplementary estimates. That's just one portion of it. There's a lot of work going on around the province. We're making very substantial commitments to mitigation measures, to hardening the sides of rivers all over the province, including in the hon. member's constituency.

We're working very closely and, I would say, very effectively with municipalities to help make sure because we respond to and support municipalities when they come with specific proposals for support from us. That's primarily how we are able to deliver the assistance to Albertans, because municipalities actually deliver on the ground and do arrange for the work that's got to be done on the ground.

I'll take a look, and we'll make sure we get the specific answers to the specific questions to the hon. member with alacrity, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members of Executive Council that would like to respond? There are a few minutes left if the independent member would like to have any further comments. Thank you very much.

We'll move on to the next block, which is a 20-minute block for the government. Are there any members of the government that would like to speak at this time?

Seeing none, we will move to the second rotation. The second rotation requires that no member may speak for more than five minutes at a time. The first block of time is 60 minutes for the Official Opposition. Are there any members? All right. Thank you very much.

We'll move on to the second opposition party.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Sure. I might as well ask a question here.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Would you like to take the full five minutes, then?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Well, whether it takes five minutes or not, one never knows, so we'll go from there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you so much. A couple of those questions were going through my mind when the hon. member from the fourth party was asking questions of the Human Services ministry in and around disability supports in this province. It did look like at least some of the line items went up. You see those there on I think it's page 44 for people to see. It's in support to people with disabilities and the like. I think it was \$64 million, actually, that went up. If

you could just walk me through why some of those costs went up. Was it the population increase or the like? Then I may have a follow-up question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Associate Minister – Persons with Disabilities.

4:50

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, \$63 million was for persons with developmental disabilities. It was essentially to slow down the pace of change that was going on. Then \$42 million was to the supports for PDD.

So two things happened. One was to slow the pace down; the other one was for the caseload. Traditionally in PDD we have 2 per cent growth. We serve approximately 10,000 people, so that would have been 200 people. This year we've had approximately 700-plus people who applied for this. As a result, that money was needed as part of the transformation. Also, the new contracts with the PDD service providers will help support the individuals to achieve positive outcomes. If that's what the question was, that's what we were looking for.

Hon. member, if we were to look at it today, 99 per cent of the service providers have signed onto the new outcome-based contracting, and when we look at what we were trying to achieve in terms of the support intensity scale, the SIS program, 95 per cent of the individuals around the province have been assessed.

Mr. Hehr: Did you guys chalk up the 700 additional people on PDD to population increase? What was your assessment as to why? Was it increased awareness of PDD as a result of the big hullabaloo in the community as a result of the cuts? Have you guys made an assessment as to why there were 700 additional people on PDD?

Mr. Bhardwaj: When you're talking about last year and slowing the pace down, as the previous minister was travelling the province and as I travelled the province, we heard from people loud and clear that they needed more time to adapt to the transformation. As a government we listened, and we slowed down the pace to adapt and allow the service providers the opportunity to make sure that they adapted to the pace. As a result, if we look at the success of that today, the vast majority of them have signed up.

To answer your other question, in terms of how come all of a sudden there's an increase in the numbers, well, some of the numbers were in the queue, which was being assessed at the time, so all of a sudden there's a jump which we see. It also has a lot to do with, you know, that on average in the province of Alberta we're probably getting 10,000 people moving to this province almost every single month. So it's a combination of things, not just one thing.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: I think that's where my follow-up question is, you know, and it moves to the assured income for the severely handicapped line item. Sir, to be blunt, I represent Calgary-Buffalo, and I have individuals who come into my office on a continual and ongoing basis who appear to be at least applying for the assured income for the severely handicapped program. In my view, they appear to be qualified and, again, appear to have available the magic wording needed from their doctor: cannot work in any capacity. Okay? Those words are said explicitly on the form. Yet despite our population growth last year, despite that we have a Minister of Education who clearly showed 18,000 more kids in our system, we somehow did not find one additional person who

moved into this province or an additional population number who qualified for the assured income for the severely handicapped program. Could you tell me why? You can see why I'm a little befuddled on that.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, I can tell you that in terms of assessing the needs of individuals, this government is very much committed to providing the highest quality of life for its citizens, making sure that they're inclusive in the communities and making sure that they enjoy quality of life, that they have a nice, caring, nurturing environment.

In terms of looking at the programs in PDD in terms of the unmet needs, in fact right now we've got a pilot program in place where we're looking at 20-plus people who are missing perhaps in some of the other areas, and we're trying to look after them as we speak right now and looking after their specific needs right now.

Mr. Hehr: I don't know if you understood my question, so I'll try it again. You know, the Minister of Education clearly indicates that we have an increased number of expenditures on the Education file from the sheer number of children who moved into this province and from the sheer number of people.

My question is: given that there are expenses going out in Education and other places that simply relate to the number of people who come into the province who need education, I'm surprised that we didn't see any increase in the number of people who have been deemed worthy or needing assured income for the severely handicapped because of our population increase. Was the program capped to say, "No matter what, we are not paying for anyone else regardless of whether they're qualified to go on assured income for the severely handicapped"? Was it just an anomaly that despite our population increase absolutely no individual beyond what was budgeted for at the start of the year was deemed as meeting the criteria of the program? I'm just wondering if you guys have had an assessment on that.

Mr. Bhardwaj: We absolutely do, hon. member. On average the assured income for the severely handicapped number grows by 2 per cent. So as we speak right now, the considerations in the assessment process for whomever applies for AISH are being considered. I don't know exactly what number you're looking for, but in terms of the actual number of people who are being assessed, it has grown by approximately 2 per cent year over year.

Mr. Hehr: So what you're telling me right now is that as long as the person qualifies for AISH and they are Alberta citizens, they will get that funding that they're due and entitled to, with no limitations on what your actual budget number is and that there's no messaging down to the rank and file saying: "Hey, look, tight budget. You're not getting any."

Mr. Bhardwaj: No. As I stated earlier, this government is very much committed to providing, you know, the highest quality of education. As long as people are qualifying, whatever their qualifications are, that's what's been allocated to them.

Mr. Hehr: All right. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We now move to the fourth party. Is there anyone? This is a block of 20 minutes, where you can speak for five minutes at a time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Yes, I'd like to go back to just the changes to the allocation for Health. In particular, the minister as well as the document itself talks about the \$136 million that was made available from lower-than-budgeted expenses in other programs. I think I heard that, basically, there was about \$15 million in savings from the delay in implementing the pharmacare program. I'm not entirely sure. Anyway, I'm wondering if the minister could simply outline for us where the \$136 million in savings came from within the Health budget.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Certainly. Thank you, Madam Chair. The \$136 million is from various areas of the Health budget. It includes surpluses that were identified in a number of areas, and I stress that the fact that there are surpluses is not a reflection that these items are still not a priority in the Health budget. They are with respect to timing differences in the allocation of the monies that take us over the year-end.

The surpluses include, first of all, some unexpected delays in the implementation of family care clinics and \$30 million net of increased patient volume accessing primary care networks; reduced operating cost requirements for the South Health Campus in Calgary and the Kaye Edmonton clinic, for a total of \$25 million; deferred implementation of accommodation rate increases for long-term care until 2014-2015, which represents \$25 million; a prior-year surplus reducing current-year requirements for blood and blood products, for a total of \$15 million; deferral and reprioritization of community programs and healthy living and other support program grant initiatives for a total of \$11 million; deferral and reprioritization of projects which implement internal information system maintenance and support for a total of \$9 million; and several other smaller reallocation opportunities totalling \$21 million from programs such as the health services provided in correctional facilities, seniors' services, and allied health services. So those, Madam Chair, contribute to the total of \$136 million.

5:00

Those surpluses and those program areas offset the considerable increases that we experienced this year in the areas of physician compensation and drug and supplemental health benefits, again referring specifically to the types of drugs that I talked about earlier for cancer and for rare and orphan diseases.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm wondering if I could just ask the minister: did you tell me the number associated with the delay in the FCCs? You might have, and I just missed it.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Madam Chair, I believe I indicated that it's \$30 million.

Ms Notley: Thirty million? Thank you. Thank you very much. Okay.

So I understand, definitely, that there were increases due to the higher-than-anticipated costs with the contract with the AMA. I understand the higher-than-anticipated volume in physician services, but I'm not quite sure of the previous one. It says that the \$100 million was due to the higher-than-anticipated contract settlement, particularly \$92 million for specialist physician services and \$8 million for primary care. I assume that those are broken out because they're not related to a higher-than-anticipated

volume in the actual service. I'm wondering if the minister can explain what those increases are due to, then. How did we end up with \$100 million more going to physicians than we'd anticipated, separate from the increased pressures due to a higher volume of services?

Mr. Horne: I'll do my best to address the question. Just before I do, I'm glad the hon. member is asking about the physician compensation line. The primary factors that are driving the request for the supplementary estimates that we have before you are in fact not due to the AMA agreement although there is a \$100 million item there. The fact of the matter is that we are experiencing larger-than-expected population growth, but we also run a health care system where physician compensation is still largely based on fees for service. About 83 per cent of physician payments in Alberta are made on a fee-for-service basis. So what happens is that a combination of rates that we pay for those fees for service and the volume associated with each one creates an increase in the cost that rises far and above population growth and inflation. I'll be pleased to talk more about this in answers to further questions.

With respect to the Alberta Medical Association agreement, the budget before us, the current year's budget, was developed while negotiations were under way, as I think the hon. member knows. One of our objectives was to manage volume increases by reallocating savings from rate reductions and cancelling some benefit programs. As hon. members may recall from the information provided by me and the House and through the media, as those negotiations progressed, we were actively working with the Alberta Medical Association in our discussions to try to reduce rates for specific fees for service that we believed to be out of step or out of alignment with fees for similar services paid in other parts of the country.

So we identified at one point in the negotiations a list of specific fees that we would have proposed to reduce. They roughly totalled \$100 million dollars. We were looking to those savings to meet our budgetary commitments for 2013-14. While we're very, very pleased, obviously, that we were able to reach an agreement in the end with the Alberta Medical Association, a seven-year agreement that included zero per cent increases in the first three years, we did not achieve through the negotiations that \$100 million reduction in fees.

What we have in place today, Madam Chair, as part of this new agreement is a structure within that agreement called the Physician Compensation Committee. It is charged with setting rates within a budgetary envelope that's identified by the government, and the chair that has been selected by the president of the AMA and myself is Mr. Chris Sheard, who will be known to many people in this House. He will be chairing and overseeing the process by which we review all of those fees. It will be up to the parties at the table to discuss the methodology that will be used to review the fees, in some cases reduce fees and in other cases, perhaps, increase fees where the evidence merits.

So that was originally the genesis for the \$100 million amount that we had hoped to achieve in savings. It did not materialize, but very fortunately, I think, for everyone and to the credit of a number of people we did successfully reach an agreement that includes a process for addressing issues such as fee-for-service amounts and considerations such as relative value in comparison to other jurisdictions.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. That was interesting. I didn't know that.

I guess, just following up from that, my one question is: are there timelines associated with the output of that committee in terms of changes that might be forthcoming? Is it expected to report within 12 months, 18 months, or is it just sort of meeting over the course of the seven-year agreement? That's just my question. What are the timelines?

The other question that maybe you could answer as well – you did sort of reference it, the \$149 million increase with respect to higher-than-anticipated volume in physician services. You implied, I think, that the volume was higher than anticipated because of the fee for service, and thus, I presume, the service offered was greater than the population increase; hence, it was higher than predicted. I'm wondering if you could speak to why it was higher or if you have any ideas for why it was higher than anticipated.

Mr. Horne: Absolutely. With respect to the question around timelines, around reviews of physician compensation, and, specifically, fees by the Physician Compensation Committee this is now a permanent part of the agreement, Madam Chair. This is an ongoing process. The chair was appointed, I believe, a couple of months ago now, so the process is just newly up and running. It will be up to the parties at the table and the independent chair to determine the agenda for the review. This is not, I might add, simply restricted to fees for individual services provided. This is with respect to all aspects of compensation, direct compensation that's paid to physicians, and that includes things like the hourly rate that has been established to pay physicians that work in a family care clinic and other alternative models of compensation that are available.

So it's a very exciting development, and obviously, you know, it is my hope that the group develops an agenda that reflects a hierarchy of priority. There are literally hundreds if not thousands of individual fee codes in the scheduled medical benefits. We talked during the negotiations about specific areas where Alberta was significantly out of alignment with other jurisdictions, so we hope that the committee will look at that in developing its agenda, but that is an ongoing process. They work, Madam Chair, within an envelope of funding that is provided for in the budget.

Now to talk specifically about volume in physician compensation and why it is an issue pretty much on an annual basis in Alberta. The total amount we spend on physician compensation is a function of both the rate and the volume. While, certainly, I would agree that a portion of that volume increase can be attributed to population growth in Alberta, it is also directly related to the ability of our health care system to make the most appropriate use of physician services.

5:10

To illustrate, I'll give you a recent example where physicians and government have worked together to make sure that we're not using those scarce physician resources inappropriately. The Edmonton Oliver primary care network a little over a year ago developed an orthopaedic screening program right in the PCN. That program provided for a common assessment process right in the primary care environment for people who, potentially, could be referred to an orthopaedic surgeon. By using nurse practitioners and by using other professionals right in the family clinic setting as part of an assessment team, this team has been able to move 75 to 80 per cent of the patients that go through there out of the queue to see an orthopaedic surgeon.

Of course, Madam Chair, what this means is that people who do need to proceed to an orthopaedic surgeon and to surgery get in the queue quicker and move through faster. That, obviously, saves

on unnecessary volume for those services. It also saves on volume for people who avoid unnecessary diagnostic imaging tests, MRIs, that also involve physician fee codes associated with them. That's a very practical example of what we hope to achieve.

It is certainly not my view as minister, and I think the AMA would share this view, that the volume increases that we have been seeing – in this year, I think we're heading close to an 8 per cent volume increase – need to be at that level. The appropriateness of the use of the services, the appropriateness of the fee that's charged if it's a fee-for-service mode, and the appropriate use of other resources are obviously critical to reducing these volume increases.

The Deputy Chair: Does that conclude your comments, hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Five minutes.

Mr. Bilous: Total or each side?

The Deputy Chair: I think there are about eight minutes left in the entire block, but you can't speak for any more than five.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Wonderful. I'm going to start off by talking about Education, so I'll give the minister a heads-up on that. A hundred and seventy million dollars for Education, \$70 million of which is operational, \$103 million of which is capital due to project delays on 35 new schools and modernizations: now, again, this was from the 2011 budget, and these are schools that are scheduled to open this fall. These are schools, again, that were announced three years ago, so I find it interesting that we're funding out of sup supply right now for schools that should be open this fall. I guess my first question to the minister, if we can go back and forth, is: will these schools be ready to open this September, this fall?

Mr. J. Johnson: I believe so. I can't answer that particularly because I don't have the specific lists of all those projects in front of me and how this cash flow rolls out with respect to any of them. Any time we're doing projects, even when the school is finished, not all of the bills have been paid, of course. I'm sure you know that. It takes a while to close out those files and those contracts and that bookkeeping and make sure that there aren't any holdbacks for shortcomings.

Mr. Bilous: A follow up – and I think I know the answer to this – just to confirm that these schools opening this fall are not part of the commitment of the 50/70 from last year. Is that correct, Minister?

Mr. J. Johnson: That's correct.

Mr. Bilous: All right. I'm curious to know. I get that sometimes costs come in after the fact, but my concern is with the previous commitment as far as the 50/70. Now, those have been announcements, but if we're having this type of delay on 35 schools, then how can we or Albertans or you be certain that all of the schools that were committed will actually be opened on time in the next couple of years?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I don't want to give you the impression that all of these 35 schools are delayed. That's not the case at all. Some of them are already open. You asked which schools, and I don't have the specific list in front of me as to which dollar is attached to which contract. Some of these might have to do with the P3 cash flow, too. I can endeavour to get you more detailed

information on that. But these are not to do with the new 50/70. It's the normal course of business that these cash flows get adjusted throughout the year based on the progress of work, and it also takes time to make sure that there are no shortcomings in the work before we flow all the money and close out the file. This all just has to do with that.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. I'm not sure, Minister, if you have the number offhand, but out of the 35 that are being completed or are already completed, as you've said, do you know how many of those are P3 and how many of those are built in-house?

Mr. J. Johnson: Sorry. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but if memory serves, from that list of 35 I think there were 22. But I'll endeavour to get you those as well. The Minister of Infrastructure is the guy that manages those projects.

The other thing is that these dollars may not just be assigned to the 35. There were other projects in addition to those that were ongoing that some of these capital dollars would be tied to. If the member wants a list of which projects these dollars might be applied to or have to do with, I'd be happy to get those.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister, for that offer. I would definitely take you up on that whenever you can get that list. That would be greatly appreciated.

Moving on, I do find it interesting and, to be honest, a little alarming, the dollars that are going to be going towards private schools and private early childhood service operators. We're looking at, you know, over \$5 million, almost \$5.5 million that's going to grant funding for private schools. Now, I think it's worth mentioning that 5 per cent of the student population in Alberta currently attends private schools. So that's a significant amount of money that's going to private schools versus, you know, money that could be going toward public. Again, they're getting an equivalent, so that \$5.4 million is an amount equal almost to 10 per cent of what the public schools are getting yet, again, with half the number of students. I guess my question is: why are private school students getting much more than their proportionate share compared to the public school students?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I know how much the member supports private schools, is a strong supporter of private schools. As a matter of fact, didn't you used to work at one? They used to pay your cheque. It wasn't a problem then, was it?

In any event, the money that we flow to schools doesn't just follow a child; it also follows demographics. Different kids come into the system with different needs, and the money for those children is different depending on whether they're an English language learner, whether they have a FNMI background, whatever kind of special needs they might have. Again, you know, I know some of the private schools are not just the posh boarding schools. These are schools for inner-city kids at risk, First Nation kids. Some of them are special needs, and some of them are handicapped, all those types of things. Certainly, we want to support those kids. The early childhood service providers do an incredible amount of good work with some really high-risk kids. So the dollars don't just flow with the head count; they flow with the needs of those children.

A lot of the growth was in the earlier years in our school system. A lot of the enrolment growth was in the kind of early childhood development, that pre-K to K to grade 3. So even when we look at the dollars that have to flow into the system, most of our small class size initiative dollars for that envelope are targeted to the earlier grades, and even though we might increase that grant – we promised, and we did; we increased that grant by 2 per cent

last year – there are a disproportionate number of kids coming into that segment of the school population, the primary grades, that K to 3, so then the enrolment exponentiates the dollars that have to go into those primary grades. That's why you might see more in the earlier years than you would just across the whole system.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Madam Chair, how much time is remaining?

The Deputy Chair: Two minutes.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Excellent. There are a couple of comments that I would love to address, Minister. First of all, I can appreciate that what you're saying is that the types of students that are coming into the private system are needing those dollars. However, there are many, many students – ELL, special-needs students, FNMI – that are in our public system that greatly need financial support and teachers that need supports in their classrooms.

I find interesting your timing, bringing up the fact that I taught at Inner City high school. So for the sake of the members in the Assembly here I'll explain, first and foremost, that Inner City once upon a time was part of Edmonton Catholic, but part of our funding formula issues meant that they couldn't get the dollars that they needed to deliver the services to the high risk. You know, 90 per cent of the students are FNMI. Many suffer from different not just struggles, but there are many that are coded. In fact, most of the students, all of them, have IPPs, et cetera. Believe me, it is my wish that those types of private schools and charter schools come back under the umbrella of Edmonton public and Edmonton Catholic, but again supports need to be there for them to do that.

5:20

The challenge that I have, Minister, is not just that some of these schools are receiving dollars that they need for the population they have. Again, I'd love to have the breakdown of which schools are getting what percentage of these dollars and how many of these dollars are going to fund private schools. You know, we're draining money from the public system to feed the private system. If there are parents and families that want to put their kids in private school, that's fine. They can. Then pay for it. The public system really should be all inclusive and should have the supports that are necessary. My question, because I'm probably running out of time, Minister, is: do you have the breakdown as far as the different private schools throughout the province that are receiving funding from this?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. The minister will probably provide those answers for you in writing.

We now move to the 20-minute block for the government. Are there any members of the government who wish to speak?

Seeing none, we have some time left in the second rotation. Are there any members in the House who would wish to further comment?

Seeing none, we move to the final rotation, which is a five-minute opportunity for the Official Opposition. Do you have any comments you wish to make?

Seeing none, I'll move on to the third party.

Seeing none, I'll move to the fourth party. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: It'll be five minutes, just so you know, and whoever responds has five minutes as well, a 10-minute block.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. All right. I'm going to jump actually – and I may come back to Education just because I enjoy the back and forth with the minister so much – to Transportation if there's a minister that can speak to it. So \$51 million is going to Transportation, \$45.5 million for the provincial highway preservation, which at the onset does not appear to be flood related. I'm not sure, then, if this means that the government is not staying on top of monitoring the conditions of the highways and that instead we're going back to just crisis response. If that's the case, I'm hoping the minister of possibly – forgive me. The Minister of Transportation is here. Where did that additional need come from?

Madam Chair, can I back-and-forth with shorter questions with the minister?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, you can. You have that 10-minute block.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Yeah. Thank you for the question. I missed a little bit at the start there. Transportation requires about \$51.5 million in operational vote to address provincial highway preservation and the 2013 Alberta flood disaster. The first amount of \$45.5 million is to address the priority provincial highway preservation work. Performing preservation work in a timely manner results in slower deterioration of roadways and is the most cost effective since delays lead to rehabilitation work at higher costs.

The second amount is for \$6 million related to the 2013 Alberta floods. This funding provides for feasibility analyses of flood mitigation projects through the Bow, Elbow, Oldman, Sheep, Highwood, and South Saskatchewan River basins.

We are also requesting a \$10 million increase in the financial transaction vote for the purchase of salt and sand and gravel to use for highway maintenance. The cost of the usage of this inventory has risen significantly in recent years.

Finally, we request the transfer of \$4 million in the capital vote from Transportation to Municipal Affairs for water and wastewater projects in Bragg Creek. This funding was originally approved under Transportation, but it has since been determined that the spending is more appropriate under the disaster recovery program within Municipal Affairs.

I hope that answers your questions.

Mr. Bilous: I think so, Minister. Sorry. Just a quick follow-up. I had a hard time hearing some of your response. [interjection] Yeah. You try telling her.

Minister, the bulk of it, because of the flood disaster relief, did go towards cleaning up the highways. Then you referenced sand and salt. So, I guess, two questions. One, shouldn't that have come out of the budget estimates last year? I'm just wondering why it's coming out of supply. Two, are any of these dollars allocated for flood mapping, or is that coming out of the budget that will be tabled tomorrow?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, the flood mapping isn't in my department. It'll be coming through Municipal Affairs through the DRP. The sand and salt is just, over the years, the cost increase and escalation. The more highways we build, the more we need. We were short in our budget, so we added to it last fall.

Mr. Hughes: Can I just augment that?

Mr. Bilous: If I can just ask a quick question before you respond, Minister. It's to do with this, too. I'm just looking at the \$6 million for the 2013 Alberta flood recovery to provide feasibility analyses of flood mitigation. In that, I guess I'm wondering: does

that contain flood mapping? Is that part of that \$6 million, or is that going to be separate?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are a lot of different categories, so it's not always understandable exactly where everything is. In fact, ESRD is really the department that has the long-term accountability for flood mapping, for the work that is being done to ensure that we're well armed and well prepared for being alerted to any possible flood conditions, those kinds of things.

You asked about the feasibility studies. There are a lot of feasibility studies going on on just about every watercourse. That comes out of the funding for the southwest Alberta task force, the flood recovery task force, the committee of cabinet that I chair. We're taking resources from that in order to prepare with each of the communities. These are largely led, in most cases, by the municipality, where they say: Okay; we need to do some work here. You know, maybe it's the town engineer or the town officials that decide they need to look at something. They go out and get third-party engineering work done on it. Given the immense volume of work that's being done around the province, people are competing for very tight resources.

Then those projects come back through. They need approvals from ESRD in order to do them, particularly if they're close to a water body. I can tell you, just as an example, that in High River there is 9 million dollars' worth of berms that are being done by the town, and they expect to have them all done by the 15th of May and to be ready should there be anything like what we saw last year. This is happening in every community right across the province that was affected by the floods last year.

I hope that answers your questions.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister. That does.

I'm going to jump to Aboriginal Relations if I can. There's \$20 million in spending for Aboriginal Relations, most of which, I appreciate, is going towards repairing, relocating, or rebuilding on-reserve homes. I know from speaking to the previous minister in the fall that there were about 600 homes affected. Just two quick questions. Has that number changed at all? Has it gone up from the 600 or down? Minister, could you provide a little bit of a breakdown between the number of new builds and the number that can be saved? I'm not sure if you have those stats with you.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

5:30

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. The actual impacted number is very near to 800 homes, and the costs outlined here cover a range of things: relocation, rebuilds, renovations. There is also a significant amount of infrastructure. As you can imagine with a house that's completely destroyed, the below-ground infrastructure is going to be impacted as well.

In addition to that, we've got to bring things up to Alberta code, which, we're troubled to find, is not really the case in many places.

So there's an array of costs involved in that. I don't actually have the breakdown of the number of new builds versus renovations or repairs. [interjection] My learned colleague, who knows better than I what needs to be said here, pointed out to me that I do have to point out that we're looking at a hundred per cent recovery from the federal government here on disaster recovery.

It's not really an Alberta responsibility to do housing on-reserve. We're doing this because it's the right thing to do. But we're looking at very close to a hundred per cent recovery here.

Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister. That was helpful.

My last question – I probably only have a couple of minutes – is to the Minister of Culture. There is \$4.3 million for Culture in sup supply, \$3 million of which is for museums and conservation assistance. Now, \$500,000 was to the Philippines, if my numbers are right or my eyes; \$333,000 for artists and arts organizations directly affected by the flood; an announcement in January of \$6 million for support of the conservation of artifacts and archival materials. My only question, Minister, is: can we expect to see the remaining \$3 million in funding from the coming budget, or where is that other \$3 million coming from?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you very much. As we all know, the impacts of the flooding were pretty incredible in southern Alberta and up in Fort McMurray as well. With respect to the funding that was announced, we did announce in total the \$14.7 million in January for heritage, arts, and nonprofits. There was some money that was made available in 2013-14, and there'll be money available in '14-15 as well. This funding that was rolled out: people are applying right now for some of that funding, but some of the other funding will be made available in '14-15.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We do have some time left in this block. Are there any other members who wish to speak in the five-minute block?

Seeing none, shall I call the vote?

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2013-14, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

Agreed to:

Aboriginal Relations	
Operational	\$ 20,758,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Culture	
Operational	\$4,393,000
Capital	\$500,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Education	
Operational	\$70,300,000
Capital	\$103,839,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:		Operational	\$1,141,867,000
Energy		Capital	\$49,841,000
Operational	\$192,000,000		

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development			
Operational	\$137,595,000		
Capital	\$62,701,000		

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Health			
Operational	\$209,000,000		

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Human Services			
Operational	\$81,649,000		
Capital	\$640,000		
Financial Transactions	\$680,000		

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Infrastructure			
Operational	\$49,769,000		

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Innovation and Advanced Education			
Operational	\$53,275,000		
Capital	\$1,680,000		

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. members, can we keep the volume down for a little bit while we take these votes? Thank you.

Agreed to:			
Municipal Affairs			

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Service Alberta			
Operational		\$895,000	
Capital		\$2,600,000	

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Tourism, Parks and Recreation			
Operational		\$958,000	
Capital		\$1,382,000	

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Transportation			
Operational		\$51,502,000	
Financial Transactions		\$10,000,000	

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Transfer from Operational vote of Education to the Operational vote of Municipal Affairs			\$9,050,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Transfer from Operational vote of Executive Council to the Capital vote of Executive Council			\$300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:			
Transfer from Capital vote of Transportation to the Operational vote of Municipal Affairs			\$4,000,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Transfer from Operational vote of Municipal Affairs to the Capital
vote of Municipal Affairs \$7,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The committee shall now rise and report.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

5:40

Mr. Jeneroux: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2013-14 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014, have been approved.

Aboriginal Relations: operational, \$20,758,000.

Culture: operational, \$4,393,000; capital, \$500,000.

Education: operational, \$70,300,000; capital, \$103,839,000.

Energy: operational, \$192,000,000.

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development:
operational, \$137,595,000; capital, \$62,701,000.

Health: operational, \$209,000,000.

Human Services: operational, \$81,649,000; capital, \$640,000;
financial transactions, \$680,000.

Infrastructure: operational, \$49,769,000.

Innovation and Advanced Education: operational, \$53,275,000;
capital, \$1,680,000.

Municipal Affairs: operational, \$1,141,867,000; capital,
\$49,841,000.

Service Alberta: operational, \$895,000; capital, \$2,600,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: operational, \$958,000; capital,
\$1,382,000.

Transportation: operational, \$51,502,000; financial transactions,
\$10,000,000.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt you when you are doing so well, but we need to keep the volume down so that we can hear the report, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. The Committee of Supply has approved the following amounts to be transferred.

Transfer from Education operational vote to Municipal Affairs
operational vote, \$9,050,000.

Transfer from Executive Council operational vote to Executive
Council capital vote, \$300,000.

Transfer from Transportation capital vote to Municipal Affairs
operational vote, \$4,000,000.

Transfer from Municipal Affairs operational vote to Municipal
Affairs capital vote, \$7,200,000.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my report.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to alert hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring in the report by Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

(reversion)

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

Bill 2

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 1

Savings Management Act

[Adjourned debate March 4: Mr. Anderson]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As always, it's an honour and a privilege to rise in this House and respond to proposed legislation. I will say in this case that I am somewhat surprised that the government chose to highlight the Alberta heritage savings fund with their first bill of this session given the dismal state of that fund. Let me elaborate as to why I think the classification of that is dismal.

In fact, I take probably the same sort of look at this as the Finance critic from the Wildrose Alliance does. We tend to see this from different sides of the ideological spectrum, but we tend to see what has transpired here in Alberta as amounting to nothing less than intergenerational theft, and by that, we mean what we have done with our responsibility to save some of this fossil fuel resource wealth for future generations.

I, like the Member for Airdrie, saw the article from *The Economist*, and I was struck by how poignant the article was in singling out Alberta as one of the violators, how not to run an oil and gas economy. There it was in black and white for all to see. It's essentially what we have been saying in this House over the course of the last five years. I don't think people mistake *The Economist* as a left-of-centre magazine or something like *Pravda* or the like. It's just generally looking at things as they are and going forth in that effect. There it was in black and white that Alberta really has made a joke out of its finances and how to really run a system that recognizes that this is a finite resource and that all is not going to continue on like we think it is.

I was also struck by the Member for Airdrie's comments in that he, too, like me, believes there is a limited time for us to get this right. In my view, over the course of the next 50 years maybe, 30 years more probably, we should as a province and a legislative body understand about saving this oil wealth for the eventual transition from an oil and gas economy at a time when maybe the stars align so that solar, wind, other things may take off or that, simply put, we move to a natural gas economy because there are

200 years of natural gas out there from ports around the world. These may make Alberta not as prosperous a place. That thought is out there with many people.

Many people, futurists, have looked at this, many people who really assess what is going on out in the world. I think that thought is different than what we had here in 1997 when we established some of these systems in place, when we thought that our oil and gas economy was going to last for another 300 years and that it just didn't matter, frankly, what we did because we were in the driver's seat.

I think that, really, what we've done with our heritage savings trust fund has been a sham. It was pointed out again by that speaker that if we had just left the interest alone from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund since 1986, that fund would be worth some \$150 billion. Let's also take a look at, say, since 2001. If we hadn't eliminated progressive income taxes – my goodness – it'd probably be worth another \$100 billion, possibly more, on top of that. Really, what we've done here has been silly. Either way you cut it, we didn't save enough. So when the government of the day chooses to highlight in one of their bills, this bill here, that they're going to use more resources from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for today's usage and today's enjoyment, I have to question the logic of that. Haven't we already stolen enough from future generations? Do we have to continue to do that today?

5:50

I also note, you know, there's an article in the *Edmonton Journal* today that really goes through the nuts and bolts of this social innovation endowment account by Mr. Ricardo Acuña, a person who I believe has distinguished himself as being a person

who thinks a great deal on this stuff. It says that these things are simply not going to work. They haven't worked anywhere else in the world. Why would they work here? The idea that Goldman Sachs is going to invest money in some of these alleged innovative treatments for, say, alcoholism or drug treatment I think is folly. They're not going to invest unless they have a guarantee on investment or a pretty good chance. He doesn't see it. I certainly don't see it. Why we aren't just investing in our non-profits or shoring up government muscle to do the hard work that is necessary simply, to me, doesn't make much sense.

Those are my initial comments on the bill and the like. You know, I'm looking forward to hearing other people comment on this. It doesn't seem to make much sense to me. I don't think it's going to make sense to a whole lot of people in the nonprofit industry who are going to have to somehow incorporate this into the mix. I don't know how this is going to be.

Those are my comments. With that, I will adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've made excellent progress this afternoon, and I move that we adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 6, 2014

Issue 4

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Hughes, Hon. Ken, Calgary-West (PC)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),
Liberal Opposition Whip
Kennedy-Glans, Hon. Donna, QC, Calgary-Varsity (PC)
Khan, Stephen, St. Albert (PC)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Leader of the New Democrat Opposition
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)
McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
New Democrat Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)
Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Hon. Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Premier
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC),
Government Whip
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 60

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

Executive Council

Alison Redford	Premier, President of Executive Council
Dave Hancock	Deputy Premier, Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Human Services
Robin Campbell	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta
Rick Fraser	Associate Minister – Public Safety
	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Service Alberta
Fred Horne	Minister of Health
Doug Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Ken Hughes	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Sandra Jansen	Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Education, Ministerial Liaison to the Canadian Forces
Donna Kennedy-Glans	Associate Minister – Electricity and Renewable Energy
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Ric McIver	Minister of Infrastructure
Diana McQueen	Minister of Energy
Frank Oberle	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dave Quest	Associate Minister – Seniors
Dave Rodney	Associate Minister – Wellness
Donald Scott	Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation
Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Khan
Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Fenske	Young
Hehr	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 6, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, as we conclude our work for this week in this Assembly, stay with us in our work beyond this Chamber, be among us in our fulfillment of duties to help others, and lead us with wisdom and kindness as we represent those who put their faith and trust in us to represent them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the members of a very distinguished delegation from Iceland. They're on a working visit to Alberta to strengthen the ties between us and to promote friendship, understanding, and shared prosperity.

I would ask each of them to rise as I introduce them: His Excellency Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson, Prime Minister of Iceland; Mrs. Anna Sigurlaug Pálsdóttir, the Prime Minister's spouse; Mr. Jóhannes Þór Skúlason, political adviser to the minister; Mr. Jörundur Valtýsson, foreign policy adviser to the minister; His Excellency Thordur Aegir Oskarsson, Icelandic ambassador to Canada; Mr. Hlynur Gudjonsson, consul and trade commissioner at Iceland's consulate general in New York; Mr. Gordon Reykdal, honorary consul of Iceland in Edmonton; and Mr. Stewart Wheeler, Canadian ambassador to Iceland. They are accompanied, Mr. Speaker, by a business delegation, which is seated in the members' gallery and includes representatives from the Icelandic tourism industry; Icelandair, which we're very excited about in Edmonton; and the Iceland press.

On behalf of the government and the people of Alberta it's a privilege to welcome all of them here to our beautiful province in the heart of western Canada. I know that their visit will be a fruitful one on many different fronts, and I'm sure and confident that our friendship will continue to grow and deepen. We are tremendously glad to be their hosts. Now I ask all members of the Assembly, who've already done it, to give them another warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome to all guests.

Deputy Premier, you have some introductions.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a good friend and a good public servant, indeed, Mr. James Rajotte, Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Leduc. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 2000 as the Member of Parliament for Edmonton Southwest and was re-elected as the Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Leduc in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011. He has served as the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance for the House of Commons from 2008 and still serves in that capacity today. Previous to being chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, he served as the

chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

I've known James for many years. I believe he's the hardest working Member of Parliament for Alberta, and I think he's the smartest Edmonton Member of Parliament for Alberta. I can say that because he's my Member of Parliament. He represents me in Ottawa, and it's a privilege to work together with him serving the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud and all Albertans. He's here today to observe question period and, more importantly, to observe the Treasurer's delivery of the Budget Address this afternoon. He's in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. He has risen, and I would ask all members of the House to acknowledge him.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let's begin with school groups, shall we? The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of grade 6 students from J.J. Nearing elementary school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Curtis McDougall; Ms Christine Sowinski, who just happened to have taught one of my daughters; and parent helpers Mr. David Roberts; Mrs. Valerie Alvarez; Mrs. Skerik; Leanne Feregotto; Mrs. Tina Barrett; and a very close friend of mine, Mrs. Joanne Krips.

I would like to mention a special young man within the group, Aaron Krips. Aaron has a great deal of energy and expends it by playing hockey and dancing competitively in hip hop. I've known Aaron since he was born. In fact, his mom and dad were my campaign managers when he was that young. Aaron is very interested in current Alberta events. I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the guides that were touring these two classes through today, when I went down to talk to them, said that this is one of the best groups that they've had. I have watched Aaron grow into a fine young man.

I've also been in this school a number of times. The teachers are excellent, and they produce excellent results, Mr. Speaker, as does our entire system. I'm sure these grade 6 students are having an enjoyable day at the Leg. today. They are seated in both the public and the members' galleries this afternoon. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 36 individuals from the grade 9 class of Ponoka secondary campus along with their teachers, Brady Teeling, Jolene Deleeuw, and parent Lee Arnold. I'd like to note how incredibly bright these young students are as they asked about the concerns that they have in protecting our education system in this province. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

If not, we'll proceed with the introduction of other guests. Please note that we have 20 more introductions to go, so may I beg your indulgence to keep your intros as short as possible so that we can get them all in before 10 to 2. Let us start with the Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce two sets of individuals. First of all, I have seven members of the Alberta College of Social Workers, five of whom

work within the Ministry of Human Services. It is National Social Work Week, and given what you've just told me, I'll jump to their names and thank them for their service: Justin Mettler, Pamela Anderson, Mira Zorniak, Tim Golumbia, Rick Guthrie, Lori Sigurdson, Alec Stratford. Social workers deal with some of the most difficult social issues in our society. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, on your behalf it's my pleasure to introduce Gurmeet and Tina Sidhu – great friends of yours, of mine, and of the members for Edmonton-Manning and Edmonton-Ellerslie – generous individuals that contribute immensely to our community. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly four representatives from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Edmonton branch and the Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta, who are here today to help pay tribute to the 200th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko's birth on March 9, 1814, and are the host organizations for the upcoming Shevchenko concert in Edmonton. My guests are seated in the gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise as I mention their names. I would like to welcome Mrs. Luba Boyko-Bell, president, Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta, and vice-president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Edmonton branch; Mrs. Maria Miroutenko, executive member, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Edmonton branch; Ms Irena Tarnawsky, vice-president, Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta; and Mr. Michael Bell, member, Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta. I would now ask that we provide them with the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by the Minister of Justice.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a delegation currently involved in importing Alberta's beef products into China, worth about \$100 million a year, which is sure to grow as demand for the high-quality agricultural product in Asia is going to increase. We are joined today by Mr. Shen Ling and Jonathan Chang with ZRHL Group, and Mr. Lin Weizhong and Liu Qing with BGH Group. Also accompanying the delegation are Mr. Jake Louie, Mr. Grant Louie, Stan Cichon, and Liang Wei Long with Canadian Elite Beef Inc. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I'd like to ask all of my colleagues to give them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two residents of my constituency, the beautiful area of Calgary-Acadia. First of all, a friend of mine, Karen Lloyd, originally from Vernon, B.C., has lived in Calgary for 22 years. She's quite active in school traffic safety, school councils, and service to her community. I had the privilege of meeting her at the door during the last election. With her also is her daughter, Hannah, who is a straight-A student, a grade 8 student at Willow Park school. She is the fourth of eight children. Her favourite topics are humanities and reading. This is her first visit here. Her mother, Karen, has brought her to see question period and also the

budget today. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Red Deer-North.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two outstanding gentlemen from the town of Strathmore. His Worship Michael Ell, mayor of Strathmore, has lived in Strathmore for more than 35 years and in many capacities has always strived to build a stronger community, and Mr. Dwight Stanford, the CAO for the town of Strathmore, who is an invaluable resource to our community and council. I would ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It gives me great joy to introduce to you and through you to members of this House a very important young person in my life. Thirty-nine years ago this weekend I had one of the greatest adventures of my life when I gave birth to our first child, Jeremy Jablonski. Jeremy is the president and CEO of The Coverall Shop in Red Deer, Alberta, that has the theme: We've Got You Covered! In the past five years Jeremy has been instrumental in winning the business of the year award twice. I'm depending on his great success so that I can have a comfortable retirement. He's in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Also with us here today, Mr. Speaker, is the president of the Red Deer College for the past five years, Joel Ward. He must be doing a great job because he just received another contract for another five years. He's a great dancer, a great conversationalist, and a visionary, and we are very fortunate to have him as the president of our college. He is accompanied by his chief of staff, Elaine Vandale, who has been with the Red Deer College for the past 17 years. She is the woman behind the man, who knows everything. She's always one step ahead. She serves the president, the college, and our community with excellence. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two active members of the community of Calgary-Hawkwood. These gentlemen volunteer for associations in our community and were very strong contributors in mobilizing community support for flood relief and community rebuilding during the unprecedented 2013 flood in southern Alberta. My first guest is Mr. Edmond Lee, president of Sunflower Development, and the second is Mr. Byron Price, with the Thomas J. Ranaghan Foundation. I would ask them to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of Education.

Dr. Swann: My guest hasn't arrived, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation, followed by the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and honoured to introduce to you and through you two members of my region in Fort McMurray, in the oil sands region, who exemplify public service. The first is Kim Jenkins. He is currently the chief operating officer of the Keyano land trust corporation. Prior to his move to the Keyano land trust corporation, he spent 32 years with the Fort McMurray public school district, the last five in the role of superintendent. He is the current Canadian superintendent of the year. Mr. Jenkins is also the chairman of the Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation.

The second individual is Bryan Lutes, who is the president of the Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation. He is also the president of the regional chapter of the Urban Development Institute. Bryan brings his experience also to the Fort McMurray chamber of commerce.

I'd like both of my guests to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now we go to the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a joy for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a tireless advocate for seniors' care in Alberta, Mr. Greer Black, a constituent of Calgary-Varsity and CEO and president of the Bethany Care Society for the last 22 years and soon retiring. Please rise, and let us celebrate you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me today to introduce to you and through you a mayor of a small community. As all elected officials know, the most overworked, underpaid elected official is the mayor of a small community. This isn't just a good public servant but a great public servant, His Worship Mr. Fred Nash. I'm going to ask Mr. Fred Nash now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by St. Albert.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you one of my staff from Calgary, Ms Jennifer Wainwright. Jennifer is in my office in Calgary, and I'm extremely pleased to have her up here. She is the unbelievable health researcher that I have on my team in Calgary. I'll ask her to rise and accept a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the House three very outstanding people who are pillars in the St. Albert community. The first, I'm very pleased to announce, is Mayor Nolan Crouse of St. Albert, who is in his fourth term on the St. Albert city council and recently began his third term as our city's mayor. In addition to serving on a number

of boards and working tirelessly for our community, he also serves as the chair of the Capital Region Board. Mayor Crouse is incredibly involved in our community, and we are most lucky to have him serving as our mayor.

My second guest, Mr. Speaker, is a gentleman named Al Evaniew. Al is a partner at the law firm of Brownlee LLP. Al is a remarkable and active member in our community. I'm proud to acknowledge and congratulate Al on his recent appointment as Queen's Counsel. I'm extremely pleased to know Al and consider Al a very dear friend.

My third guest, Mr. Speaker, is Cathy Heron. Cathy is a lifelong St. Albert resident who is in her second term as city councillor. She's a very busy wife, mother, and an incredible community member who works, again, tirelessly for our community, and most importantly she's a great neighbour.

I believe His Worship Mayor Crouse and Mr. Evaniew are seated in the members' gallery. Councillor Heron is in the public gallery. I'd ask them now to rise and receive our warm acknowledgement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to extend and delay the clock at the same time here for a couple of minutes so that we can finish these intros off.

Let's go to the Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Mr. Fouad El Kardy and Ms Selma Amery. Fouad and Selma are dear friends of mine and are here to join us for this exciting budget day and to witness the building Alberta plan in action. I'm pleased to introduce them to you today and ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests today, all great community leaders. Coming all the way from the charming town of Elk Point, Debra McQuinn is a financial planner with Servus Credit Union by day and is an Elk Point town councillor and the president of the Elk Point chamber of commerce by night, yet somehow she finds time to play for the town's ladies' hockey team. Debra has been a resident of Elk Point for 17 years now along with her husband, Andrew, and two children, Colby and Jessica.

My second introduction is Chris Brown, who joins us today as a resident of Lloydminster, where he is a reporter with the *Lloydminster Source*. Chris came to Alberta in 2013 from Ontario, where he previously served as the assistant director of communications for the hon. Leona Dombrowsky, the former Minister of Education. So with the Minister of Justice he has something in common. He's a former Liberal staffer.

The third is Garth Rowsell, who is a financial adviser with Edward Jones in Lloydminster, and I know he would be able to teach the government a thing or two about planning a budget and saving for the future.

I'd ask that my guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you the mayor of Woodlands county, Mr. Jim Rennie, and his lovely daughter Hannah. The Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and I in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock share this dedicated elected official. Please join me in welcoming the mayor and his daughter.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Medicine Hat.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a man of integrity, a man of principle, and a man who's always told it like it is. This man is my hero, but more importantly, members of the Assembly, it's my dad. Mr. Speaker, he's seated in your gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The final one is going back to the Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Please read the names that you have and ask them to rise, and then we'll move on. They've already been introduced. Thank you.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate it. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, a delegation from China and members of Canadian Elite Beef Inc. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: My apologies. Medicine Hat, you had one on the list here, too. Quickly.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests that have joined us today in the public gallery. Petros Kusmu is the president of the University of Alberta Students' Union and is always a great advocate for students across Alberta. Petros has been instrumental in the IGNITE report, which was launched last month and which I hope the minister reads cover to cover. Petros was born and raised in Edmonton and in his spare time performs with his band, Quordal Fusion.

Conner Brown is the vice-president external for the University of Calgary Students' Union and the chair of the Council of Alberta University Students, and it has been my great pleasure as the advanced education critic getting to know him. He's originally from North Vancouver. He played for the Delta Ice Hawks before attending the U of C.

Kenneth Taylor is the vice-president external for the SAIT Students' Association and is also the chair of the Alberta Students' Executive Council. Ken has been great to work with over the last couple of months, and he is a great reminder that our best and brightest come from all 26 of Alberta's postsecondary institutions.

I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to recognize the leader of the Liberal opposition, and that will be it. We will have set a record for introductions in this Chamber today.

The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Toby Ramsden. He's an accountant. He works with Dogs with Wings. More importantly, two of his children ran as candidates in the last

provincial election for the Alberta Liberals. I'd like Toby to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, your first main set of questions.

Premier's Travel Expenses

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is in all sorts of hot water over her travel expenses, and I want to give her a chance to clear the air for Albertans by telling us some of the details about how her travel decisions are made. Can the Premier tell us how her flights are booked, who decides between the options, and who signs off on those decisions?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I understand that Albertans want to know that their tax dollars are being used wisely. That's why I've written to the Auditor General. I've asked him to review out-of-province flights. We've grounded the government planes travelling outside of the province until that review is done. I've also asked the Minister of Finance to move forward with RFPs with respect to accommodation, with respect to rental cars, and with respect to transportation airlines.

Ms Smith: I notice, Mr. Speaker, that she didn't answer the question, so I'm going to try again more specifically. I would like the Premier to tell us about how the decision was made to take a government plane to Ottawa for the South Africa trip. We know there were at least three other options, which we put in a press release on February 6. I'll table that. Can the Premier tell us why she ruled out a \$625 direct flight from Calgary to Ottawa on WestJet and why relatively inexpensive Air Canada flights through Winnipeg and through Toronto were also rejected?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this House before, this is certainly something that's very important, which is why I've asked the Auditor General to come to the office to review these processes. That is certainly the appropriate forum for this. From our perspective, it's very important that Albertans know that they get value for taxpayers' dollars. We want to make sure that the Auditor General feels completely comfortable taking that responsibility on – it's an independent office of the Legislature – and we're looking forward to that work.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe third time's the charm. A whistle-blower who works for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations told us a different story. They said that they provided several flight options, including the ones I've mentioned, that would have made it to Ottawa on time. However, they said that these options were rejected because it is the official policy of the Premier's office that the Premier will never fly economy and that the Premier will never take any commercial flight that is not direct. Can the Premier tell us whether that's true?

Ms Redford: No.

The Speaker: Official Opposition House Leader, your second main set of questions.

Mathematics Curriculum

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, over the last two days we have been asking the Education minister some important questions about the

elementary math curriculum. Alberta parents are concerned that the new math curriculum is not focused on learning the fundamentals, but in mathematics, knowing the basics is the whole point. Will the minister make changes to the elementary math curriculum so that mastering basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division is its primary goal?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this question sounds very reminiscent of one I had a few days ago, to which I answered quite simply: we will. There is a curriculum review ongoing of the math curriculum right now and our entire curriculum, and one of the key goals of that is to make sure those foundational, basic pieces are more strongly emphasized.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Education minister keeps trying to say that there's no issue here, but Alberta parents disagree. They know their kids are not being taught to memorize the basics. They know that their bright and talented kids are getting to grade 5 without memorizing their times tables. Does the minister agree that if kids leave elementary school without having memorized their times tables up to 10 times 10, then our math curriculum has utterly failed them?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, once again, it seems like they can't take yes for an answer. We agree that this needs to be very strongly emphasized. We agree that this is something that we want to make sure is in the curriculum and is a high priority. However, I don't want to concede that Alberta is not one of the top-performing English jurisdictions on the entire planet, which other jurisdictions tell us is the case and international tests prove is the case.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's the reason it shouldn't be changing. Now, we know that the government has a hard time with basic math because we have to keep explaining deficits to them over and over and over again. For decades the Alberta basic math curriculum was world leading. Now this government has decided to chase after New Age fads, and our kids are suffering the consequences. Now, the Premier is a mom, so will she stand with the thousands of other parents and instruct the Education minister to return us to the tried-and-true methods to teach basic, elementary math?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's pretty exciting to embrace change, to look at progress, and to think about how to improve things. That's why Albertans voted for us two years ago. That's why this budget today will speak to progress and will speak to change. I hope that the hon. member isn't suggesting that we can continue to succeed and grow and thrive in this world and in this country by keeping everything exactly the same. I know that's what they said in the last election, but I thought they would have learned something themselves by now.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. opposition leader for her third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hope all the parents over there would go and ask their kids what the result is of two times eight, because a lot of kids these days can't answer that question.

Electricity Pricing

Ms Smith: Albertans expect fairness in the marketplace. That's why market manipulation allegations brought against TransAlta are so troubling. If true, they represent a major breach of public

trust and another failure of this government to protect Alberta families and small businesses from being gouged on their power bills. To the Premier: will she confirm that her government will not tolerate electricity market manipulation?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why we have a system in this province that ensures that if those circumstances are found to be true, the companies have to deal with the consequences. I'll go further than that, and I will say that if it is determined that that is the case, then we will ensure that we are accountable to consumers, that companies that pay fines are able to see that money go back to consumers because that's protecting consumers.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The allegations against TransAlta are serious enough in some jurisdictions to be considered at least illegal if not criminal. The rules in Alberta, however, are not nearly as strict. As is, they currently appear to give market manipulation and intentional price inflation a free pass, leaving ratepayers like families and small businesses open to being gouged. To the Premier: is it the policy of the government to allow a power company to turn off a power plant so they can force up prices and gouge consumers?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there is an independent process going on to determine what happened. It would be ridiculous for this hon. member to suggest that this government would think that that was appropriate. That's why we have a system in place. It's a system that protects consumers. That's why this issue is before that regulator right now, and we look forward to the results.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rules don't protect consumers. It certainly appears as though the electricity market is stacked against everyday Albertans who pay their bills. Those bills keep going up, and while this kind of price gouging is great for a handful of power company executives, it could mean the difference between profitability and bankruptcy for a small business or making monthly rent for a family. Again to the Premier: why hasn't her government stepped in to protect consumers by clearly making it illegal to turn off power plants and drive up prices?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in this province we have a system that is very closely monitored, and we know that there are times when decisions have to be made. Our concern as a government is to ensure that if a company ever makes that decision and it is found that there is any sort of manipulation, they pay the consequences. That is why we have a regulator. That is why this investigation is going on, and we look forward to the results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Public Service Compensation

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Madam Premier, you're recognized as a smart lawyer and a champion of human rights. Alberta union people, therefore, are honestly insulted and distressed by Bill 46, apparently designed to save public dollars. Bill 46, of course, takes away bargaining rights guaranteed under the Charter and assured by former Premier Peter Lougheed, your mentor. Please explain to all Albertans, particularly unions, how a protracted Bill 46 battle in the courts, paid for by Albertans and which you will lose, will save money.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we said when we introduced the legislation, we believe it's very important to be accountable to Alberta taxpayers and to make sure the public servants get fair compensation. We hope that that legislation will allow for a negotiated settlement. We understand that everyone has the opportunity to take a look at challenging legislation. We understand that the AUPE has decided to do that. Our fundamental responsibility is to try to reach the outcomes that we set in our legislation, and we'll try to do that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm just going to get the Minister of Justice to clarify whether Bill 46 is sub judice.

Mr. Denis: My understanding is that it's under appeal, Mr. Speaker, 23(g).

The Speaker: It is sub judice, then, to pursue questions in that way.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, do you want to recraft your two final sups?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier not see how this action is harming both her moral credibility and her credibility as a responsible steward of the public purse?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's precisely the responsible stewardship of the public purse that brings forward a bill like Bill 46. We made a promise to Albertans and a promise to all of those who are paid by the public that we would treat them fairly and we would treat them consistently within the context of the fiscal framework. We made the promise, and we made agreements with various sectors that are paid by the public purse, and we wanted through Bill 46 to ensure that that same opportunity was extended to our union.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Try and avoid Bill 46 directly.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, these are front-line workers: public servants, teachers, cleaners, nurses.

Adding insult to injury to all Albertans is the poorly managed imposition of pension changes. Have you considered the cost of these negative actions both in terms of loss of your trust and reduced worker morale and lost productivity in this province?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the pension changes that we're advocating for the pensions. The promise of keeping a defined benefit pension plan is exactly what we're protecting. As I said in this House a few days ago, in July 2012 I met with all the pension boards – members of the union are represented on those boards – and we talked about whether we would go to a defined contribution or a defined benefit program. They wanted us to protect defined benefits, and that's exactly what these changes are all about. In fact, we are doing what we can to protect the promise to those employees.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Premier's Travel Expenses (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A government policy identified by the Auditor General specifies that "family members may not travel on government aircraft unless it is a minister's spouse invited to an event." A list in the current policy

of those eligible to take government aircraft does not include family members. While we can all sympathize with working parents who try to balance work and family, it does not justify breaking the rules just because you can. To the Premier: why do you think that the rules don't apply to you?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, on the policy as it relates to the government aircraft, number one, the first call on our aircraft is if we have an emergency. We had that last summer when we had to move cabinet ministers, environment ministers, the minister responsible for municipal affairs to the area of the flood. That was the first call.

The second call on our planes, Mr. Speaker, is the Lieutenant Governor because we want him to be in communities that are not served by commercial aircraft. We want him to be in places like High Level, High River.

The third priority, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier. When the Premier or any cabinet minister is asked to attend a function and they want to bring a family member, whether it's the spouse or others, we have said: let's keep the families involved in what they're doing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A little different than the answer that the Finance minister gave yesterday. I have the list here. It doesn't say family members on the list.

Most working moms – and dads, too, for that matter – would like to spend more time with their kids, but they're also very upset when this Premier uses the mom defence to justify taking a government plane to and from Palm Springs when a cheaper commercial flight was available. To the Premier: why didn't you take a commercial flight back from Palm Springs instead of ordering up a government aircraft at a cost of thousands of dollars?

Ms Redford: Because there were no commercial flights available from Palm Springs on that day.*

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, that is patently untrue.

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

Mr. Mason: And I'm going to go on to another matter. Apparently, the Premier also had two security staff with her in Palm Springs. Albertans are wondering: why does the Premier need security while on vacation in Palm Springs? Is this standard practice? How much has been spent on vacation security since the election? Please fill us in, Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To this member's inquiry, it has always been the practice to provide any Premier of this province with security, and the security is tailored towards their individual needs.

With respect to specific comments, we don't talk about matters of police investigations and court cases here, and similarly neither should we talk about matters of individual security. That is something that is determined by the actual security officers, not politicians.

The Speaker: Okay. The first five questions have come and gone, so no preambles now to your supplementaries, please.

Let's start with Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

*See page 99, left column, paragraph 3

2:10 Whistle-blower Protection for Physicians

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been inundated with story after story of waste and mismanagement from this government. The last week alone has provided a number of completely unacceptable examples coming from the Premier's office. Knowing this, you would expect that the Alberta whistle-blower commissioner would be busy. Sadly, that's not the case. As reported in January, most days the phones are silent, and only one single investigation has been undertaken. To the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: how can you call this gold-standard legislation when, seemingly, nobody has the confidence to use it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think every Albertan can be proud of the whistle-blower legislation this House brought forward. It provides an opportunity for any concerns to be addressed. We have a person that's responsible for dealing with the legislation. I think it's an effective piece of legislation. The fact that people aren't calling might lead to conclusions other than that suggested by the opposition. We are a very transparent government, and we're delivering transparency.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, they don't have trust in the whistle-blower legislation. They're blowing the whistles to us, actually.

Given that last fall, when I asked the minister when he would be following the advice of Justice Vertes and tabling legislation to include whistle-blower protection for all physicians, not just a few directly employed by AHS, the minister seemed entirely unaware of the recommendation, has the minister rethought this? When will you be bringing forward amendments for the spring session?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that 89 per cent of physicians are covered by the current whistle-blower legislation. That seems to be a fact that's ignored by the opposition. There is also a section of the whistle-blower act that covers the other 11 per cent. They can also make a whistle-blower claim if they'd like to. So physicians are covered by whistle-blower legislation in Alberta.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I said it last fall, and I'm saying it again: he doesn't even know his own legislation. Read the report.

Given that the minister has made it clear he has no intention of following through on Justice Vertes' key recommendations to provide whistle-blower protection to, Minister, all physicians, should Albertans be calling the commissioner to report the outrageous waste of \$10 million on this inquiry, that you ignore?

Mr. Scott: Just to repeat what I've said earlier, physicians are covered in Alberta. Eighty-nine per cent are covered directly by the whistle-blower legislation. The other 11 per cent are covered by a section in the whistle-blower legislation that permits any person in Alberta to make an anonymous report, or if they have information, they can make a report of a whistle-blower concern that they have. Alberta is covered by whistle-blower legislation. The legislation is effective.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, your point of order was noted at 2:09 p.m.

Let's move on to Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Public Service Pensions

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville are dedicated, hard-working public servants, and they are looking for justification for the changes to their pension. Well, I would think that last night at the Public Accounts Committee the Auditor General clearly gave that justification. To the hon. minister of Treasury Board and Finance: if you informed us today that instead of having a defined benefit plan, we would have a defined contribution plan, how much money would Alberta taxpayers be on the hook for?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the actual number would be part of the actuarial analysis that would have to happen, but what would happen is that you would have no more new entrants going into the defined benefit program to pay for the unfunded liability that is already there. That means that taxpayers, presumably, would be on the hook for the full amount, \$7.4 billion. That's one of the reasons – one of the reasons – why we did not look to do what the opposition wants to do, which is to cut off entrants to the defined benefit and move to the defined contribution. We think that having a defined benefit program for our employees is a benefit they should keep.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the government has agreed to accept the Auditor General's recommendations, are you going far enough to ensure that my constituents receive their pensions when they turn 80 or 90? They are living that long.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in the Public Accounts last night asked the Auditor General whether or not, you know, we can maybe just let this slide a little bit because maybe things are going to get better. From the *Hansard* Blues of that I'll quote the Auditor General saying: "No. To consider these plans at this time is imperative." It's imperative that we do what we're doing now so we can keep the promise to those individuals because they are living longer. We need to do it now.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, one of the concerns of the Auditor General was if employees could clearly understand their plans' designs and outcomes going forward. How can you ensure that plans will be conveyed in a reasonable manner so that Albertans can understand what they are buying into?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a limited number of ways that we can fan that out. There are 500 employers that are participants in these plans. That's a lot of employers. It's a lot of employees. So what we've done is that we have asked those employers to distribute a letter from the ministry to the individual plan members to tell them what those changes are. We've also communicated them through the websites that we have, both our department website as well as the plan websites and the APS website. We've actually put calculators out there. I'm very happy to say that the calculators are probably the most popular piece of what's on the legislation because it tells the employees exactly what's happening.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

School Construction in Calgary

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary communities of Cougar Ridge, Aspen Woods, West Springs, and surrounding areas are desperately needing some schools. They're not alone on that front. In fact, a group of concerned parents and teachers have created a petition, which has received more than 4,000 signatures thus far, asking the minister for help. I'm sure he has seen it. The schools in these areas are bursting at the seams. They literally have no more room for kids. I'd like to ask the minister: will he offer them some help before 2016?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I think I said in this House a couple of days ago, the Premier gave me pretty direct instructions to get the approved schools open in 2016. I'm working diligently with my staff to do that. I would say to the hon. member that he should tell those constituents of his that they ought to be very glad that this government is there rather than anybody he's attached to be in control, because under this government, under this Premier we're building Alberta. We're providing those classrooms so that kids can prepare for the future.

Mr. McAllister: A couple of points to the Minister of Infrastructure. They're not my constituents. They have two PC MLAs as their representatives. Secondly, the difference between us and government: we'll build the schools, not put in the signs, Minister.

Given that parents, teachers, and students behind this petition deserve a new school as much as anybody else, will the minister commit to what Wildrose has been asking for all along, a full public and prioritized infrastructure list to put an end to these kind of guessing games so communities know when they are going to get the schools they so desperately need.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I was to hold up a blank piece of paper, that would be a list of what they're going to build. The fact is that we have actually committed to a bunch of schools. They're on our website. After the budget today what's approved will be on the website if it's not already there. Rather than make statements, as the members of that party have in the past, about how up to a third of the schools approved aren't needed, they should perhaps actually be onside with Albertans and their children that need those schools. This Premier, this government, building Alberta: we're doing it; they would not.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, this party on this side of the House would build 100 schools and honour every commitment made by that party. The only shovel that that minister has is the one that follows him around to the podiums when he makes announcements.

Given that this government is building a new school in Elbow Park for 200 students or thereabouts for up to \$20 million, I would ask the minister: has he considered building a bigger school at this site or a more appropriate site that would take the pressure off some of the surrounding Calgary communities and put more kids in a new school?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, for a party that says that they want to respect local autonomy, I find this line of questioning almost comical. We respect the good work that the local school boards do. We respect their capital plans when we have situations like we did through the flood. When they build the regular capital plans,

we take direction from them, and we try to respond to them because they're on the ground. It's funny how now we're criticized for not building fast enough the schools that they didn't actually want us to build.

2:20

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, your point of order has been noted at 2:19 p.m.

Let us move on to Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Please, no preamble to your supplementals. We let a couple go there. I'm not going to let much more go on. No supplementals with preambles.

Labour Shortage in Bonnyville-Cold Lake

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I heard from my constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake about the serious challenge of labour shortage in the hospitality sector. With the high-paying oil sands so close our local businesses are having a hard time finding workers. These issues affect not only the local economy but our quality of life. My question is to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. What are you doing to help employers in Bonnyville-Cold Lake find workers in sectors other than oil and gas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that is a problem that businesses not only in the region of Cold Lake but throughout the province are suffering from. It's a problem that most jurisdictions would love to have. Nonetheless, it's a problem. We are working with groups that are currently underemployed or unemployed, marginalized groups. We are working with our aboriginal communities, persons with disabilities. Often women find it difficult to re-engage themselves in employment. We are focusing on Albertans and Canadians and trying to merge them into our workforce in all parts of the province.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: with Kehewin First Nations so close why aren't we doing more to help the aboriginal people fill in these jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our aboriginal community is, obviously, one of our priorities. We have business and industry liaisons throughout the province working with aboriginal communities and businesses and trying to match skill sets with the jobs available. Also, the Minister of Human Services has 59 offices throughout the province of Alberta Works, where job fairs are being put on, where resumés are being built, where linkages between people who are unemployed or underemployed are made with businesses, so no effort is being spared to make sure that every single Albertan and Canadian gets to work to the maximum of their ability.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: if the employer cannot find any Albertans to do this job, how will you help them to assure that they will get workers that they desperately need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, that's a good question, Mr. Speaker. Let me be perfectly frank on this. It is the position of this government that

any and all jobs available in Alberta have to be offered and made available to Canadians first. Canadians should have the first right of refusal; however, in cases where there are no workers ready or willing to take on the jobs that are available, there is the federal program of temporary foreign workers, which has been a lifesaver to Alberta industry for a number of years already, and we will probably end up continuing to rely on this program for many years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Alberta Energy Regulator Investigations

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been watching and waiting to see if the performance of the new Energy Regulator actually does balance environmental protection and oil development. In 2012 Plains Midstream had a pipeline spill of crude oil into the Red Deer River and the Gleniffer reservoir. The Energy Regulator has just ruled that the company didn't inspect the pipeline, didn't follow up on government warnings, and failed to mitigate once the oil started leaking. One would expect some severe, memorable sanctions, right? No. Does the environment minister support the regulator's sanctions for Plains Midstream's incompetence and repeated breaches of directive 019?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are aware that the Energy Regulator has completed their investigation. I can tell you that my department is currently finishing our investigation. Once the investigation is complete, we will determine if charges need to be laid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much. To the same minister: what happened to polluter pays? How is requiring Plains Midstream to develop emergency responses – wow; tough – to audit past actions, really tough, and to develop resident contact plans a vigorous sanction?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the Energy Regulator has done their due diligence. They came up with their recommendations. I can tell you that my department is now continuing to look at the investigation, and we will do the appropriate thing. That could include prosecution. But at this point in time it's premature for me to say what we are going to do, as our investigation is not complete at the department level.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Minister, either you or the regulator can put those sanctions through.

But let me ask if the minister is able to give me three examples – okay; how about one example – of where the regulator put the environment first, ahead of industry's interests. Just one example.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, being that the regulator just started to be in the process of doing its business in the last eight weeks, I can't give an example at this period in time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Medicine Hat.

Seniors' Drug Coverage

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 private health insurance dealers, big pharma, and other hangers-on were lined up to cash in on this PC government's plan to charge seniors more for prescription drugs. Albertans responded and hit back that blatant attack on universal health care so far that it took this government four years to find it again. My question to the Health minister is this. Why did you think that you could dust off this dirty, old policy to make seniors pay more for their prescriptions and not expect that sensible and caring Albertans would make you stand down on this once again?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to talk about our policy with respect to how we're making drug and supplementary health benefit programs accessible to more Albertans. What surprises me on a continual basis is the lack of recognition on the opposite side of the House of the fact that 20 per cent of Albertans have absolutely no access to drug coverage in this province. We are seeing drug costs grow at a rate like never before. Albertans continue to enjoy the broadest, best drug coverage in the country. We intend to keep it that way. What we have said is that we will pursue this by consolidating our 18 programs into one and a number of other measures.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that this PC government has now twice tried to defy common sense to make seniors pay millions more for their prescriptions, why won't this minister stop putting his hands on the burners of the stove, smarten up, and stop rolling out this sort of two-tier, American-style private health care and put in a universal pharmacy plan?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is welcome, if he wants to, to raise the ire of Albertans, or at least attempt to, by talking about the United States. What we're interested in is Alberta and coverage for Albertans. We will continue with our program to consolidate those 18 separate programs into one. We will continue to push the federal government, join our other provincial colleagues in pressing for national catastrophic drug coverage for Canadians, and we will continue to capitalize on our very good success in the last year in lowering drug prices that are paid by Albertans, both by taxpayers and out of pocket.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that in 2009 the income-based seniors' pharmacy plan was shot down and that in 2014 the scheme to make seniors pay more for their prescriptions went up in flames, too, is this a pattern that you intend to follow, to attack seniors specifically and universal health care in general? Mind you, maybe your PC government won't be here next time to pull these sorts of tricks.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's hardly a question of government policy, but I'll give him an answer on government policy. It would be very refreshing, actually – and maybe we'll hear it in estimates – for this hon. member to demonstrate what knowledge he has, if any, about the very broad drug coverage that's offered in Alberta; about some of the very specific drug cost pressures, including drugs to which this hon. member and his colleagues and all members of this House are advocating access for Albertans; his knowledge about the efforts of provinces and territories to work together to address this issue, to see Canada pool our population health risk and our financial resources to deliver a better level of coverage for Canadians. Maybe he's interested in that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Emergency Medical Dispatch Services

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Slowly but surely the Minister of Health is retreating on his failed one-size-fits-all approach to emergency dispatch. The minister is now letting some communities keep their local services. It's good to see him coming around to the Wildrose point of view, and we support these changes. There is a growing opinion that the minister is cherry-picking these communities based on petty partisanship. Now, I won't jump to conclusions, but something is not right here. Minister, why are some communities like Lethbridge and Red Deer allowed to hold on to their dispatch services while others like Medicine Hat are not?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has already jumped to one conclusion by suggesting that we have moved away from our commitment to consolidate dispatch services across the province. What we have done and what was reflected on this morning at the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association breakfast by our Premier is that we have successfully worked out arrangements with Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Fort McMurray to have them operate as satellites of the provincial dispatch system.

What this means, among other things, is that any of those three satellites will be able to run the entire provincial system in the event of a natural disaster or another emergency. They will be able to better serve their own citizens by accessing ambulances across borders.

2:30

Mr. Pedersen: Given that this government likes to talk about local decision-making and supporting local autonomy, why is the minister listening to some communities but still ignoring others?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to wax nostalgic about jurisdiction in Alberta, municipal versus provincial, he's welcome to do that. What we're interested in is building a state-of-the-art emergency medical services system for the citizens of this province by adhering to a dispatch system which recognizes the principle of borderless ambulance services. What that means is that the closest ambulance to any emergency will be the ambulance that responds to the emergency anywhere in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that countless community leaders from Medicine Hat have been loud and clear about wanting to keep our regional dispatch services because the service you offer is not as good as what we had, why is the minister ignoring locally elected officials and proceeding with central dispatch, that our community just doesn't want?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to talk about these sorts of jurisdictional issues, he's welcome to pursue those questions with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What happened here is that three very large dispatch providers that provided integrated dispatch services – fire, ambulance, and, in some cases, police – have become satellites of our provincial dispatch system, allowing us to complete the remaining 5 per cent of dispatch services in this province and bring them into the provincial system. The common technology that will be used, the borderless ambulance principle that I talked about earlier, all of

those other improvements are going to be made possible because these municipalities co-operated with a provincial . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Elk Population in Northern Alberta

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley and other north-western constituencies have seen significant stored grain crop damage from elk over the past few years, with no government herd culling or financial compensation programs in place. This is a problem our government created in 1968, when elk was first transported into the area by our provincial government. The damage is also compounded by the fact that we are experiencing poor grain-delivery opportunities. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Given that the Alberta government introduced elk into farming communities, will financial compensation be offered to the numerous farmers who have suffered increased, severe financial hardship?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a compensation program for farmers who suffer damages to unharvested crops. It appears that the issue here relates to harvested crops. By the way, for the unharvested crops you don't have to have insurance to be covered by this program. On the issue of harvested crops I think that as a policy decision one would have expected that those crops are protected, they're in storage, and so on. It appears that there is an emerging issue relating to the stored crops. I'd be happy to speak with the member further, and I have already alerted my department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: given that the elk population is well over 5,000 head in the Spirit River area alone, will we see the launch of a herd-culling program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a timely question for the member. I was just up in Rycroft a couple of weeks ago and had a chance to talk to a number of municipal officials and farmers in the area, and they did raise their concerns about the number of elk in the area and the fact that there was eaten grain. So we have two issues. One, we've got to get the railcars on the roads so we can get the grain out of there. The second thing we have to do is reduce the elk population. Right now hunting allocations for elk will be determined this spring, and multiple seasons will be available for hunters to help reduce the number of elk in the area through hunting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when are we going to change those hunting regulations, maybe going possibly from a draw system to an open system that allows anyone to purchase an elk licence and to have maybe a longer hunting season?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we're still not the Wild West, so we have to do some things and have some order. We believe that the elk population will be successfully managed through a draw system, where the number of hunters are limited and multiple hunting seasons are available. Allowing a smaller number of hunters at one time and more hunting seasons will result in more elk being removed. What we will do through the draw season is that we will have my staff contact hunters with elk licences and pair them up with farmers with elk problems. That's something that we can do to help reduce those issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Health Facilities in Strathmore

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Strathmore hospital is the second-busiest rural hospital in Alberta, seeing over 33,000 patients a year in the emergency room alone. Despite rising populations and the broadening of their service area the facility has not expanded to meet our community's growth. In fact, since construction in 1985 the facility has not met the growing needs and could be putting patients at risk. Given that AHS's capital plan says that, and I quote, many of these facilities are functionally and physically obsolete, to the Minister of Health: what are you going to do to address this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll answer the first question, and my colleague may wish to supplement. As the hon. member knows, the Strathmore hospital redevelopment is referenced in AHS's five-year capital plan. It is currently an unfunded project. It is one of several across the province. I am aware of the importance of Strathmore to serving not only residents in that area but also to providing overflow for Calgary. I visited the facility myself. We'll continue to work toward completing the necessary needs assessment for this, but as I'm sure the hon. member will appreciate, our capital dollars are limited.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last year the government forced the Strathmore hospital to close the functional 25-bed unit and given the much-needed demand for facility expansion, why is it taking the Health minister so long to address this important issue?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not the case. Neither the government nor AHS forced the Strathmore hospital to close the long-term bed unit. What happened, of course, was that across the street a brand new facility developed by the operator Age Care opened, a state-of-the-art continuing care facility that provided state-of-the-art housing for those residents and the residents that were to follow. We call that progress.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would this minister be willing to meet with myself, the local council, medical professionals, and AHS to address the critical need for the expanded and up-to-date facility our community requires now?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that both my colleague and I have visited the Strathmore hospital. I know that I certainly

have talked to the mayor on a number of occasions, other stakeholders in the community. I believe we have a handle on the situation, as I said. We certainly understand the need and the desire of the community, and we will continue to work to do our best to make this occur. But, as I said, it's one of several projects across the province that we continue to try to complete.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Grain Rail Transportation Backlog

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last year's unbelievable harvest in northern Alberta our farmers have been trying to get their grain to market, and it seems to me that we are having some backlogs in the railroad industry. Could the minister of agriculture please explain what his department is doing to help us with this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member quite properly raises an issue that's probably the forefront issue in my department right now and a topic of lots of discussion around rural Alberta. The fact is that this is a matter of federal jurisdiction. The federal government is responsible for the railways. We have been a loud advocate with the federal ministers both of agriculture and of transport regarding this issue as have other provinces. I was in Winnipeg last week speaking with Minister Ritz and provincial counterparts. My deputy has been engaged in conversations with provincial deputies across western Canada and the federal government as well as the transportation deputies we're working on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, these tracks have many different commodities on them, and we're hearing that a lot of these tracks are being used with oil right now. Could the minister tell me: are we taking a back seat to the oil industry as grain producers in this province?

2:40

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, that's a comment that we also hear quite a bit, and we've been making inquiries not only with the rail companies but also with experts who are independent observers. My understanding and information is that there has been an uptick in some of the traffic in terms of moving oil, but the numbers are pretty small. They're only about 2 per cent of the rail traffic compared to 16, 17 per cent for the grain traffic. It's interesting, though. When you look at our province's submission to the rail freight review in 2010, we said then that only 20 per cent of shippers of all kinds were happy with rail service. So it's not just the grain people.

The Speaker: Thank you.

One more supplemental, please.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you. Just one more: could the minister actually tell me if, in his discussions with the rail companies, they're going to be adding any more grain cars to supplement the fleet?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of talk about railcars. I think that may be a simplistic suggested solution. I think that

there's an agreement and a consensus that it's really the power, the locomotives, and the crews that are probably the bigger issue. Also, on the question of grain cars – and I had a discussion with Minister Ritz about this last week – it's not just the number of cars; it's where they're spotted and when they're spotted, and that's a huge issue for our producers and our grain companies. So all of those are details that we're encouraging the federal government to deal with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Lyme Disease

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lyme disease is a serious illness that is hurting Albertans, not only with debilitating symptoms but also with a chronic lack of support from provincial health services. Anyone at any age can get it through contact with deer ticks. And while the disease is best remedied in early phases, symptoms increase in severity over time. Several of my constituents have expressed their dismay at not being able to access diagnostic services and the treatment they need to cope with Lyme disease. To the Health minister: why is AHS denying access to testing for Lyme disease?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, Lyme disease is, in fact, a very serious disease. I agree with the hon. member. I am not aware of any circumstances where AHS is denying testing for this. It's actually a public health matter. The tests are conducted through AHS public health in co-operation with the chief medical officer of health for Alberta and the staff in my ministry. But I'm certainly not aware in any case that we are denying testing.

Mr. Rowe: I will be happy to provide the minister with evidence that that is indeed happening.

Given that many of my constituents are having to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for testing alone and then must pay for their own treatment, when will this government take Lyme disease seriously and ensure Albertans have access to the best available diagnostic services and treatment?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure the hon. member appreciates, neither he nor I requisition tests for Lyme disease. Those tests should be and are requisitioned by physicians. I'd be happy to look at the information that the hon. member refers to and see if there is any irregularity or anything that needs to be done in order to improve access to testing for Lyme disease. We take it seriously as do our partners to the east and the west.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you for that, Minister. I will provide that evidence.

Considering that the severity of symptoms increases over time, does the minister agree that early diagnosis must be available for Lyme disease so that Albertans are assured that such serious illnesses are addressed and alleviated as soon as possible instead of being left on their own to suffer without hope of assistance from this government?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I would be speculating in trying to answer that question, and I don't want to do that. As I said, I'd be happy to look at whatever information the hon. member has that pertains to the experience of his constituents. I repeat that we take the disease very seriously. I know there are a variety of tests that are available to detect Lyme disease, and I said that I'd be happy

to look into it further upon review of the information provided by my colleague.

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

Calgary Southwest Ring Road

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall, after many years of negotiations, an agreement was signed to allow for the construction of the southwest section of the Calgary ring road. My questions are all for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, many of my constituents are questioning the design of the bridges crossing the Elbow River. Can the minister confirm that the designs will be reviewed in light of the water levels and flow rates that were experienced during the flood of 2013?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to this member. She is always advocating hard for her constituents. Last June's floods in southern Alberta resulted in an unprecedented amount of damage to many provincial roads, highways, and bridges. Part of the recovery effort includes making sure new transportation infrastructure like the south Calgary ring road can withstand the low flow rates and increased water levels experienced last spring. All design requirements for proposed bridges over the Elbow and Bow rivers will indeed be reviewed and will incorporate the high water levels that are based on the latest flood maps.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you very much. My constituents are also concerned about the impact of construction and traffic on the Weaselhead environmental park. What measures will be taken by your department to address these concerns?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to building Alberta's transportation infrastructure in a way that is responsible for our natural environment. My department will continue to work closely with the city of Calgary and interested stakeholders to ensure that there is minimal impact on the Weaselhead environmental park. The road design will follow all legislated environmental requirements.

Ms L. Johnson: My final question: when and where is the construction expected to begin on the final section of the southwest ring road?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, completing the Calgary ring road is just one of the many examples of how we are building Alberta to increase market access for our province's goods and services while supporting growth in local communities. Currently we are considering building the final stages of the Calgary ring road in two segments, using a P3 model. Project updates will be posted regularly on the Alberta Transportation website.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the formal time for question period has expired, but we do have a request for a point of clarification, which we are going to hear from the Deputy Premier, regarding an issue that arose during question period. That will entitle the opposition to ask a supplemental question, to which an answer will then be expected.

The Deputy Premier.

Premier's Travel Expenses

(continued)

Mr. Hancock: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier, in responding to a question earlier today, subsequently realized that she had not been responding specifically with respect to the flight that the question was about.

To correct the record, commercial flight options were considered, but there were reports of significant challenges with getting passengers out of Palm Springs at the time. The decision was made to send the government plane to ensure with a degree of certainty that the Premier would be in Calgary in time for Premier Klein's memorial.

That's the correct answer to the question that was addressed earlier. The Premier realized subsequently that she was not addressing the flight that was requested about.*

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Deputy Premier clarifying on behalf of – oh, pardon me.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Is this in response to the Official Opposition or to the ND opposition?

Mr. Horner: The ND opposition.

The Speaker: My apologies, Calgary-Shaw.
Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, clearly, Mr. Speaker, there were plenty of options available during that time between Palm Springs and coming back. So if there is some obfuscation or some smoke that's being blown there – clearly, the planes were there. Why didn't the Premier choose to ride a commercial plane instead of spending \$9,000 of public money on this flight unnecessarily?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's easy for the opposition or others to take specific decisions out of their context, without all the information, and then make these types of character-slighting allegations. The reality is that people make difficult decisions every day, use their best judgment, using the information that they have at the time.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're fighting the clock here, so to speak, but let's give it a go. Let's start with Edmonton-Decore, private member's statement, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

200th Anniversary of Taras Shevchenko

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to help commemorate the bicentenary anniversary of the birth of an eminent Ukrainian national poet, accomplished artist, and humanist of global stature and significance in Ukrainian history, namely Taras Shevchenko. On March 9, 2014, and over the course of the year Ukrainians from all over the world will pay tribute, through festivals, presentations, and activities, to the 200th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko's birth.

Shevchenko was born a serf, orphaned at 12, grew up in poverty and misery, but died as Ukraine's national bard. For his satirical political poetry he was arrested, punished with military service, exiled to a remote region, and was forbidden by Czar Nicholas I to write, draw, and paint, an edict he patently ignored. Taras Shevchenko was never allowed to live in Ukraine. However,

shortly after his death his remains were transported from St. Petersburg to Ukraine and reburied on Chernecha Hora, known as Monk's mountain, in Kaniv.

2:50

The importance of Shevchenko's poetry about Ukrainian culture and society has garnered a unique place in Ukrainian history. His uncompromising poems exposed the terrible conditions under which the Ukrainian nation was suffering. This resulted in a reawakening of Ukrainian national identity, which is unprecedented in the history of any nation. Also, his artistic works laid the foundations for the use of Ukrainian as a language of modern Ukrainian literature.

Taras Shevchenko was revered as an ardent fighter for freedom and liberty. He was a great hero, who dreamed of a time when his country would be a free, sovereign state in which the Ukrainian people, their language, culture, and history would be respected and valued for all time.

Mr. Speaker, God bless the Ukrainian people. Glory to Ukraine. [Remarks in Ukrainian] Glory to the heroes. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Women's Issues

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we approach March 8, International Women's Day, I set aside time to take stock, to review how far women in Alberta have come and how far we still have to go to achieve the full and equal participation of women in the life of the province. Now, this week we had both the throne speech and a budget speech, so I thought it would be an appropriate time or opportunity to see if the provincial government is making the grade. Is it moving toward that equal participation?

Well, there's still a wage gap between men and women, no matter the education or upbringing. Women running single-parent households continue to be more likely to be living in poverty. Immigrant and new Canadian women are still less able to access ESL training, leaving them behind their spouses and their children in language skills. We look longingly at Quebec's \$10-a-day child care fees. Minimum wage still disproportionately affects women workers.

While government has added advisory councils and policy commissions of every possible shape and size, it closed both the Advisory Council on Women's Issues and the women's secretariat after starving them of funding for years. Now, there is no mention of the concept of consent in the health or sex ed curriculum, nor do we store sexual assault kits so survivors can recover and then consider whether they wish to contact the police. Rather than increasing the number of provincially elected women to reach a critical mass, Alberta has steadily declined in the numbers elected. This government still does not adequately, never mind fully, fund shelters for survivors of violence against women nor sexual assault centres nor agencies for pregnant and parenting teens nor any other NGO that provides services primarily for women. Alberta has made disgraceful progress in cases of missing and murdered indigenous women.

There is no question that women have made progress, but like so many things in Alberta, it could be so much better. Women are an untapped resource for us, one that Alberta needs more each day, and I will continue to press for this government to take

*See page 92, right column, paragraph 7

leadership roles in achieving economic, social, and legal equality for women.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Edmonton-South West, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Youth Engagement Think Tank

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Youth Secretariat I'm very excited to rise today in recognition of the second youth engagement think tank, which is set to take place on Saturday, March 15. The core principle behind this undertaking is the importance of getting youth actively involved in engaging and improving their communities. The first think tank took place in December 2013, and its great success led to the decision that a follow-up discussion ought to take place.

Mr. Speaker, the second think tank will allow for a more in-depth exploration of ways to maximize engagement opportunities for youth. In particular, four fundamental questions have been selected for discussion. What principles should guide youth engagement moving forward? How should family and community engagement councils engage youth? Are youth being sufficiently represented in the draft children's charter's principles? How can youth be engaged in the development of a bullying prevention strategy? Exploring these four questions is an essential task for the young Albertans that will be gathering on March 15. By doing so, they will be taking another step in cultivating themselves as future leaders in their communities and in our great province.

Occasions such as this truly highlight the importance of emphasizing the role of youth as we seek to build upon our strong families and communities. Informed and motivated youth are the lifeblood of a bright and prosperous future. This is why I'm immensely excited whenever I get the opportunity to participate first-hand in encouraging their enthusiasm to make a difference in the lives of those around them.

Mr. Speaker, for this reason I know that all hon. members in this House will join me in wishing these young Albertans well when they convene at the youth engagement think tank next weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Events in Ukraine

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations I want to speak to you about something near and dear to my heart, the situation in Ukraine. On behalf of ACAUR, my family, and the Ukrainian community in Alberta I want to say thank you to our Premier, the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, the Minister of Culture, and our Prime Minister for the support given to the people of Ukraine.

Our government is stepping up to provide aid to Ukraine and continues to stand with the government of Canada in opposing all efforts to undermine democracy and freedom in Ukraine. As we stand beside the people of Ukraine, we are hopeful that a peaceful resolution will soon be found. We honour the 100 Ukrainians who gave up their lives so future generations would experience freedom and democracy. Ukrainians around our province have held memorial services to pray for those who've lost their lives in the struggle for freedom.

We live in the greatest province and country in the world. The freedoms we take for granted are those same freedoms I hope and

dream Ukrainians in Ukraine will one day experience regardless of what language they speak or in what part of the country they live.

Once again, the Ukrainian community of Alberta thanks the Premier and all members of this Legislature for the unified support and understanding of the difficulties facing Ukraine today and for bringing this issue to the forefront.

Thank you to all.

The Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Highway 3

Mr. Stier: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently, at a meeting of the mayors and reeves of southern Alberta, significant concerns were once again expressed regarding the lack of attention to the highway 3 twinning upgrades and improvements that were promised several years ago by the government of Alberta. Communities across southern Alberta have looked forward to these improvements to highway 3 as that road system connects dozens of communities with one another and also forms the key connecting corridor to the province of British Columbia and the northwestern United States.

Stretching across the province, the road serves many small towns and rural areas plus Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, and the Crowsnest Pass communities. It is the main transportation route into and out of the southern tip of the province that carries Canadian products to foreign markets via the nearby U.S. border and to the west coast terminals in Vancouver. This road was extensively studied, had several recommended new alignments to eliminate the frequent bottlenecks, and was approved several years ago for significant upgrades, including the twinning west of Fort Macleod, by Premier Stelmach himself in May 2007. Yet despite the fact that this corridor is so vitally important to Alberta's economy and an obvious crucial link to our entire transportation network, it still today remains a two-lane road in most areas, full of bottlenecks, with only slightly altered areas that have had only minor improvements.

As the mayors and reeves of southern Alberta are deeply concerned that the provincial government has been ignoring this issue for far too long and fear that without added attention to this matter the economies in the region will continue to be hampered, on their behalf I'm asking for immediate attention by the Minister of Transportation and for this government to please act now. Make this project a chief priority by putting it on the major highway construction plan just as soon as it may be possible, please.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interject here, but it's 3 o'clock, and unanimous consent to proceed with the conclusion of the daily Routine has not been asked for, so I must go directly to points of order.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for unanimous consent to hear the last member's statement, to extend the Routine today for one more member's statement.

The Speaker: Well, I'll ask for it, but just so you know, I still have to deal with points of order after that.

Mr. Campbell: Yeah. It's only two minutes.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Then let us hear, please, from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

3:00 National Lymphedema Awareness Day

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues, for allowing me to provide my member's statement.

On behalf of our colleague the MLA for Calgary-Foothills I wish to draw to your attention that National Lymphedema Awareness Day is today, March 6.

Lymphedema is recognized as one of the most feared side effects of cancer treatment, yet public awareness of it remains minimal. We have chosen this day as the day to draw attention to the problem, whether it is primary or secondary, cancer related or not. Lymphedema is a chronic, long-term condition in which excess fluid collects in tissues, causing swelling. It commonly affects but is not limited to the arms and legs and can affect people of all ages. According to the proclamation of Lymphedema Awareness Day over 100 million people worldwide are affected by some form of this condition. It is often a consequence of surgically removing the lymph nodes or due to damage caused by radiotherapy.

Founded in 2003, the Alberta Lymphedema Association is a not-for-profit charitable organization. This dedicated team of people recognized the need to help people living with and affected by this. The association serves as a learning one, committed to ongoing education and awareness about lymphedema. They act as a resource to empower affected individuals and their families in managing this condition.

This date unites the entire lymphedema community to take action and to raise awareness of this underrecognized condition. Mr. Speaker, today is a day for therapists to honour their patients and for patients to honour their therapists and for all of us to understand lymphedema a little better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I must proceed directly now to points of order. There was a point of order raised at around 1:56 p.m. by the hon. Minister of Justice, and perhaps he's not wanting to pursue it, or is he?

Mr. Campbell: No. We'll withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That is officially withdrawn on his behalf by the Government House Leader.

A second point of order was raised by the Government House Leader at 2:09 p.m., and I've received a note indicating that you wish to withdraw. Is that correct? Okay. The Government House Leader says that that is correct.

So we have one point of order left. It was raised at 2:19 p.m. It was Calgary-Shaw with respect to an answer being given by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will, in the interest of time, do this as quickly as possible. I'll give the minister, hopefully, the opportunity to do the honourable thing and be a team player for his own team and just simply withdraw the remark.

But we've heard it in this House before – it probably will not, unfortunately, be the last time – this whole idea that our party, Mr. Speaker, will build nothing or, as he suggested, that he could hold up a blank piece of paper, and that is what our infrastructure plan

would be. It is a fabrication. It's a manifestation of a communications director who thought that it would be a great talking point. It is patently false. I would just simply ask the minister to do the honourable thing and under 23(h), (i), and (j), please, to just withdraw the remark.

The Speaker: Let's be quick about this. Hon. minister, do you wish to rethink this or withdraw it?

Mr. Campbell: No, Mr. Speaker. There was no point of order. We had a question from the opposition to the hon. minister. The hon. minister gave his answer. This was a policy discussion. We disagree with their policy. You look on their website and see what their policy is, and we patently disagree with what the Wildrose is doing. There's no list. There's no point of order.

The Speaker: Well, I suppose that clarifies the position that the government has on this matter. I think you've indicated what the Wildrose has. If you have something that clarifies this further by way of a tabling, then why don't you bring it into the House and table it on the next sitting day, and that will clear this matter up even more formally.

All right. With that, we will observe the necessity to recess the session until 3:15 p.m. to allow adequate time for the set-up of the budget speech itself. Accordingly, the House stands recessed until 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:04 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's take our chairs, please. Quickly.

Orders of the Day Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits these estimates of certain sums that are required for that year and recommends them to all.

Please be seated.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the 2014-15 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2014-15 government estimates. Further, I now wish to table the government's business plan, titled Strategic Plan, and the ministry business plans.

The Speaker: Hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, just before you deliver your comments, I wonder if we could take a moment and congratulate someone who's celebrating her birthday today, and we'll just see what the President of Treasury Board has in mind for her and for all Albertans.

Hon. Premier, happy birthday.

Government Motions

Mr. Horner: I now wish to table the government's Budget 2014 fiscal plan, which contains the operational plan, savings plan,

capital plan, and major economic assumptions used in developing these plans.

Budget Address

11. Mr. Horner moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to present the government of Alberta's proposed budget for the fiscal year 2014-15, a budget that is fully balanced. Before this one, 100 provincial budgets have been tabled in this House. No two budgets have been identical, and each one has reflected the times in which it was being presented, whether it's supporting the tens of thousands of Albertans impacted by major flooding in southern Alberta or helping Albertans cope with the devastating drought in the midst of the Great Depression or working to maintain a fiscal balance in the face of rising and falling revenues, the price we pay for being an energy economy.

Change and adversity are not new to this province, to its people, or any of the governments before this one. One of the constants over our history is the resilience of Albertans and our ability to recover from whatever challenges may arise. Albertans have always been defined by their irrepressible spirit, right from those early days when a handful of fearless western Canadians decided to call Alberta home. This is despite what George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, said in the 19th century: "The west should be left to the trapper and trader. Forever."

Albertans have never been afraid of a challenge. We've never been afraid of rolling up our sleeves, whether it's to tackle adversity or to work towards our dreams. It's this commitment to the future and the courage to shape it that has allowed Alberta to evolve over the last century and become the remarkable province that it is today.

We've been building Alberta from day one. This is why people chose Alberta more than 100 years ago, and it's why they continue to choose Alberta today. We stand out among provinces and we always will. In fact, in spite of what early detractors like George Simpson said, many people, including economists and other experts, point to Alberta as the place to be now and in the future.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, there are some good reasons for this. As we enter a new fiscal year, Alberta is outperforming Canada and the United States. Alberta has led all provinces in economic growth for the last two years, and many forecasters estimate Alberta is Canada's economic growth leader for 2013 as well. And we keep going. The big five Canadian banks expect Alberta to top all provinces again in 2014.

We led all provinces in job growth in 2011 and 2012. Over the past 12 months Alberta created nearly 70,000 jobs, accounting for just under half of the jobs added in all of Canada over this period. Last year Alberta's unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent, the same as it was in 2012 and well below the national rate of 7.1 per cent. This speaks to just how good our job opportunities are when we can boast such a low unemployment rate in the face of such high population growth.

More than 105,000 people moved to Alberta last year. That's like adding a city the size of Red Deer. The numbers do tell the story. For living and raising a family, for working or starting a business, and for playing and enjoying the good life that Alberta has to offer, Alberta is the people's choice.

Now, Mr. Speaker, our government has also made choices. Some of them have been tough choices. All of them have been the right ones. I'll talk about some of the choices we've made in this budget, but first I'll speak about how decisions we made over the last fiscal year have set Alberta on a course for success. A year ago almost to the day I stood in the same spot and tabled a budget that represented a once-in-a-generation shift for our province, and it set a new direction for our government. It had to. The actions we took in Budget 2013 were necessary to address numbers that were substantially different than what we are seeing today. At this time last year we were facing a potential \$6 billion shortfall in revenue thanks to volatile energy prices and the lower price Alberta producers were getting for their bitumen.

Budget 2013 included some hard but necessary decisions. It forced us to not just scrutinize our spending but to rein it in. It was one of the toughest budgets we'd seen in a while. It included a zero per cent increase in operating expense, and that wasn't easy, not when for the past 10 years the average increase in operating expense had been 7.3 per cent. It wasn't easy as well, Mr. Speaker, when population growth plus inflation was 4.3 per cent, but we did it.

Budget 2013 brought responsible change to how our government does business in this province. For example, we brought together some of the best and brightest minds from across Canada to discuss Alberta's economic future. Last year we hosted two economic summits and two forecasting summits. We tapped into the expertise of leading economists from Canada's top banks to get us the most accurate forecast we could.

Of course, we know that even with their expertise, as soon as our forecast goes to print, there's a high chance it's already off, and of course there's a hundred per cent certainty someone will tell us we're wrong. In any forecast there are many unknowns. We don't know what the Canadian dollar will do. We don't know what the energy market will do. That's why we base our forecast on what we hear from those experts. We don't pick and choose to meet a certain objective. We don't forecast high to justify extra spending just as we don't forecast low to justify lower spending.

Last year, based on the most accurate information available to us, we held the line on our spending. It was the right decision, one that's helping us turn a corner. To be clear, Mr. Speaker, we haven't quite finished turning that corner. We can't see everything that's around the bend, but we need to be prepared for whatever is there.

It is in that same spirit of optimism and caution that I announce an operational surplus of \$2.6 billion in Budget 2014. Happy birthday. Mr. Speaker, you can be sure this government has a plan for this money. Even more than a plan, we have legislation. Last March we introduced the Fiscal Management Act, or the FMA, along with Budget 2013. The FMA ensures that each year before we do anything else with our revenue, we take money off the top and we put it into savings. Because of the surplus we will reach the \$5 billion in our contingency account in this budget. With more savings in the bank we'll be ready should we need to deal with another significant or unexpected challenge in the future.

Stronger revenue has put us in a much better fiscal position this year, and improvements to our revenue are due to a few factors. For example, we've seen a healthy return on our investments. In fact, we expect investment income in 2014-15 to be the fourth-highest ever. A lower Canadian dollar has also made a difference. The drop in the exchange rate has brought more money for our energy resources, which, of course, are priced in U.S. dollars.

More significant is the increase in tax revenue. With more than 100,000 people moving to Alberta in the last year and no sign of that slowing down, there are more Albertans paying personal

income tax and corporate tax. Tax revenue accounts for nearly half of total revenue, so that has an effect on provincial coffers. We've seen a 5 per cent increase from last year, Mr. Speaker.

Nonrenewable resource revenue accounts for 21 per cent of total revenue, so when prices are up or, conversely, when prices are down, you can bet Alberta's bottom line feels the impact. Unlike in Budget 2013, prices are up, and in 2014-15 we expect resource revenue to be \$9.2 billion, more than 6 per cent higher than last year. This demonstrates quite clearly just how much Alberta's revenue is affected by the ups and downs of the global market.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, energy has brought Alberta both rewards and challenges since the Dingman discovery well put Turner Valley on the map a century ago, in 1914. That marked the beginning of Alberta's new identity as an energy province, a label that continues to attract job seekers, innovators, and entrepreneurs to Alberta today.

Last summer Alberta's population surpassed 4 million people, and our population continues to grow faster than all other provinces. In fact, we've tripled the national growth rate. This isn't the first time that Alberta has experienced tremendous growth. Canada's first census showed that Alberta's population jumped from 73,000 in 1901 to nearly 375,000 in 1911. That's an increase of 413 per cent in just one decade, Mr. Speaker. When Leduc No. 1 was discovered in 1947, another big moment in Alberta's energy story, it led to another rapid population boom. Now, here in 2014, a century away from the Dingman discovery, we're feeling it again.

There's no question that population growth has its economic benefits. When more people choose Alberta, more people pay income tax, more people spend money in our shops and businesses, and, of course, more people use government services. Alberta is expected to reach 5 million people in the next decade or so. That's about the time that my grandsons will be graduating high school, Mr. Speaker. So not just as Finance minister but as a grandfather and father I want to make sure this province can continue to provide a high quality of life for future Albertans. I want to be sure that when my grandsons are adults, maybe even with their own kids, they have access to the schools, roads, and health facilities their families will need.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that Albertans want the same for their children and their grandchildren. They've told us public infrastructure is a priority. We know it's essential to our quality of life. That's why building Alberta for today and for tomorrow will continue to be the focus of the year ahead. With Budget 2014 we will continue to implement the building Alberta plan. I'm excited about the progress that we've made over the last year, and we will continue our work under the plan's three priorities: investing in families and communities, living within our means, and opening new markets for our resources.

Since the beginning, Alberta's cities, towns, and communities have thrived because of the strength and determination of the people who live in them. Families and communities are the backbone of Alberta. That's why 60 per cent of the operational expense is allocated to support the ongoing success and quality of life of Albertans across this province.

We've made a number of promises to Albertans, and we've kept them. For example, we're working with 24 communities to establish family care clinics across the province. We're building the first wave of 50 new schools and 70 modernizations. We're on track to finish the Calgary ring road. That's the realization of an agreement 50 years in the making, Mr. Speaker. We're also on our way to completing the Edmonton ring road ahead of schedule. We don't believe Albertans should have to wait years for us to build

and maintain public infrastructure, especially when our province is growing faster than any other.

Albertans should not have to drive on unsafe roads, and families should not have to drive miles out of their way because the schools in their neighbourhoods are too small for the number of students or nonexistent. Why should we make Albertans wait for adequate infrastructure when we are in a position to build now?

3:30

Our capital plan delivers the right infrastructure in the right place at the right time. We're investing more than \$19 billion over the next three years through the building Alberta plan. We will ensure Albertans today and in the future continue to have the schools, the health facilities, and the municipal capital projects they've told us are important to them.

We are investing \$3.7 billion under the municipal sustainability initiative so municipalities can continue to build strong communities by meeting local infrastructure priorities. Mr. Speaker, that's a \$150 million increase over three years from Budget 2013.

We are investing \$1.4 billion to support other municipal infrastructure, including \$667 million that honours our commitment to the green transit incentives program, also known as GreenTRIP. I'm sure the mayors will be happy.

We are investing \$2.6 billion over three years for building, maintaining, and renovating health care facilities. This allows us to complete the work on health facility projects in Edson, High Prairie, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat, to name a few, Mr. Speaker.

Our three-year capital plan also includes \$5 billion over the next three years to build, expand, and maintain Alberta's provincial highway network. That's nearly 28,000 kilometres of paved roadway that moves goods to market, gets kids to school, and takes Albertans to work. It also brings tourists and new Albertans to our province.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing \$2.7 billion over the next three years for the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. We're investing \$735 million over three years to rehabilitate more than 2,500 kilometres of existing provincial highways. That's nearly a 65 per cent increase over last year's capital plan. We are investing \$691 million over three years to finish twinning highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray. We promised Albertans we would enhance their safety on highway 63, and we are keeping that promise.

With \$1.8 billion budgeted over the next three years for school capital projects, we are also keeping the Premier's promise to complete 50 new schools and modernize another 70 facilities. We are investing three-quarters of a billion dollars for postsecondary facilities over the next three years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 includes \$4.9 billion in new direct borrowing for capital. We're not hiding it. Alberta's strong economy and our positive economic outlook mean we've got a triple-A credit rating. That's an excellent position to be in, and it means we can access interest rates still close to 50-year lows. Albertans and financial experts alike have told us that borrowing for capital makes good financial sense. What doesn't make sense is spending our savings, which are currently earning over 11 per cent interest, when we are borrowing at less than 4 per cent. It doesn't make sense to wait a couple of years to build a school, for example, when over those two years the building costs will escalate, and Alberta taxpayers would end up paying 10 per cent more than what we would have paid if we'd built today. In the meantime during those two years our families would still have trouble finding new schools for their children.

We will not sit idly by because of some ideology against debt at all costs because, Mr. Speaker, there is always a cost. In the mid-90s the Alberta government didn't invest in capital because of the circumstances of the day. The decision to delay investment in infrastructure may have been the right one for the time. In 1996, for example, interest rates were about 9 per cent, quite a bit higher than they are today, and the province was feeling the pressure of an accumulated debt from previous deficits.

We are living in different times, Mr. Speaker. Consider this: the population of Alberta was 2.6 million in 1994. In 20 years – 20 years – we've added a city larger than Calgary to our province. That's more than a million new people who need access to schools, who drive on our roads, who use our health facilities. Over the last 20 years government has struggled to catch up with our province's infrastructure needs, and today public infrastructure is the number one priority for us and for our municipalities. Our borrowing plan ensures Albertans continue to have the infrastructure they need today and into the future.

A critical part of our borrowing plan is our debt repayment plan. Just as we have economists, we also have experts who are focused on how we borrow, including how we repay our debt. We make sure money comes off the top each year to pay the interest costs on our capital, and we are setting money aside now to repay this debt when it comes due in the future, more than half a billion dollars in this business plan alone, Mr. Speaker.

Our borrowing plan also includes a cap on debt-servicing costs that limits how much we can borrow. Interest paid on debt cannot exceed 3 per cent of our operational revenue. So let me be clear. We are borrowing only for capital projects. We've borrowed zero dollars for operations, and, Mr. Speaker, this is how it will continue to be. I would like to add that our borrowing plan does differentiate us from other provinces. While other provinces borrow to keep the lights on, to deliver services, or to pay off accumulated deficits, Alberta is only borrowing to build the future of our province. This will result in tangible assets Albertans will use and enjoy for decades.

Without borrowing any money for operational spending, Budget 2014 provides \$40.4 billion for government operations. It brings an increase of more than \$1 billion in spending for health, education, postsecondary, and support for vulnerable Albertans. We are investing in healthy families, communities, and seniors. We are increasing the Ministry of Health's operational budget to \$18.3 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's an increase of more than \$600 million.

Budget 2014 provides \$805 million for community programs and other services, including community-based health and wellness programs, tissue and blood services, and enhanced home-care and rehabilitation services. We are investing \$271 million to support primary care networks and family care clinics. We are increasing the Alberta Health Services base operating grant to \$10.7 billion. We're also providing \$393 million per year over the next three years to support new health care capacity at the South Health Campus in Calgary, the Kaye Edmonton clinic, and the Strathcona community hospital.

We know that health care providers are a cornerstone of our health system, and we are providing \$4 billion in 2014-15 for compensation and development programs for the almost 9,200 physicians and 1,500 medical students in our province. We're investing \$1.5 billion in drug and supplemental health benefits for Albertans. This budget provides \$353 million for the Alberta seniors' benefit in 2014-15, an increase of more than 6 per cent from last year.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors' benefits in the country. Building Alberta

means strengthening programs and services that support children, families, and vulnerable Albertans. Budget 2014 is increasing the operational budget of the Ministry of Human Services by more than 5 per cent from last year. This includes providing \$967 million for programs that encourage independence and community involvement for over 10,000 adults with developmental disabilities. It also supports the families of children with disabilities as well as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives. This is an increase of almost 6 per cent. We're investing \$703 million in programs that help underemployed and unemployed people find and keep jobs and help eligible Albertans cover their basic cost of living.

Budget 2014 invests \$735 million in child intervention. That's a 6 per cent increase from last year and includes \$199 million for foster care support, funding about 5,000 child placements. We are also investing \$288 million in 2014-15 for child care programs, also an increase of more than 6 per cent.

We're investing 6 and a half billion dollars in our kindergarten to grade 12 education system so that Alberta's kids will continue to have access to leading-edge learning opportunities and so we can continue to strengthen the best education system in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

We are increasing Alberta Education's operating budget to accommodate the booming student enrolments and changing student demographics. This reflects our government's commitment to enhance funding in priority areas like small class sizes, inclusive education, and for school infrastructure.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's universities, colleges, and polytechnics are a great source of pride for Alberta. With Budget 2014 we will continue to place a high priority on advanced education, including entrepreneurship and innovation, so more Albertans can find their passion and maximize their potential.

We're improving access for students, using our savings to support scholarships, and helping entrepreneurs and innovators get their ideas off the ground. We are also unfreezing the access to the future fund, which supports innovation and excellence within Alberta's advanced learning system by matching the generous philanthropy of Albertans and world-wide donors.

Postsecondary institutions will receive more than \$2.1 billion in operating grants. With \$50 million from the access to the future fund, postsecondary institutions will receive \$106 million more in operating support in 2014-15 than we projected at this time last year. We recognize the important role that learning and innovation play in our future, and Budget 2014 provides more than \$2.8 billion in 2014-15 for this ministry. That's more than a 5 per cent increase from last year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is a priority of this government and this Premier to honour Alberta's communities, ensuring the safety of families and the resiliency of those communities. Last year's flood in southern Alberta tested that resilience, and Albertans were quick to prove that we remain strong when overcoming adversity. We continue to recover from the devastation of the floods, and Budget 2014 provides nearly \$1.1 billion in operational expense and capital spending over the next three years to address flood recovery initiatives. This money is in addition to the \$3.8 billion in spending forecast in 2013-14, which was mostly related to the disaster recovery program. Flood recovery funding in 2014-15 will complete the floodway relocation program, it will provide property tax relief to affected municipalities, it will continue addiction and mental health supports for Albertans affected by the flooding, and it will support the Alberta flood recovery interest rebate program to assist small businesses in affected areas.

Budget 2014 also shows this government's support for safe communities and our commitment to fighting crime. We are investing \$500 million in public security programs, more than 5 per cent more than the 2013 forecast. This includes an increase in funding for the provincial policing contract, providing for 40 new front-line RCMP officers in this fiscal year.

A second pillar under our building Alberta plan is living within our means. Mr. Speaker, this is about restructuring our priorities and spending smarter. We will live within our means by challenging how our government spends, investing wisely, saving for the future, and changing processes where we need to. In Budget 2014 operating expense is increasing by 3.7 per cent. That is less than population plus inflation, which is 5 per cent, but higher than what was in last year's budget.

Budget 2013 was a hold-the-line budget. It focused on fiscal prudence, spending restraint, and getting our own house in order. That meant and still means challenging every dollar we spend. We've been doing that, Mr. Speaker, through the results-based budgeting process, which continues to review every government program and service to ensure relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness.

We will be reviewing how we regulate the financial sector in Alberta. The financial sector is an important part of our economy and of Albertans' lives, and this review will ensure that we continue to be a leader in the regulation of pensions, insurance, and financial institutions.

In Budget 2013 we also bent the line when it comes to spending growth. As I said, in the 10 years prior on average we had increased operating expenses by 7.3 per cent per year, much more than population plus inflation. That kind of growth had become unsustainable, so we reined it in. That's why we have a determination to control wage growth in the public sector. Salaries make up around half of government's operating expense. We implemented management salary freezes and are working towards a 10 per cent reduction in the number of managers.

We reached successful agreements with doctors and teachers, and we're working to secure a wage agreement with government workers, one that's fair to both the employees and to the taxpayers, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure government offers competitive salaries. We want to continue to attract the best people, but it isn't for government to lead the pack. To protect the defined benefit plans of our workers, a pension promise, we are also making changes to our public-sector pension plans.

We need to ensure the plans are sustainable for the long term. It's become increasingly clear that when it comes to pensions, as the Auditor General has stated, the status quo is not the way to go.

Living within our means also means investing wisely. We know what we need to invest in to be successful in the future: a knowledge-inspired, innovative, and diversified economy; a resilient workforce with the right skills to participate in a dynamic economy; and a sustainable education system that meets the lifelong learning needs of Albertans and the needs of the province. With an eye on our future, Budget 2014 invests approximately one-third of the operational budget in programs and services aimed at securing Alberta's economic future.

Securing our economic future also means saving for our future. With last year's budget we established the first legislated savings plan this government has had in decades. Our plan dictates that we save in good times and in challenging times. Before we do anything with our revenues, we take money off the top, and we put it into savings each and every year.

Our savings plan is for the long term. Alberta's heritage savings trust fund will grow from just over \$15 billion today to over \$17 billion by 2017. As I said earlier, thanks to our approach to

savings and our commitment to controlled spending, Alberta's rainy-day fund, the fund that helped us during the challenge of the flood, the contingency fund, will reach \$5 billion in this year's budget. Overall, Mr. Speaker, our savings will grow to nearly \$24 billion by the end of the fiscal year and to \$26 billion by the end of this fiscal plan.

No one will argue with saving money, but the question we need to answer is: why do we save? It's an important question. Our savings plan involves putting aside a lot of money. It doesn't make sense to simply lock it away under the mattress with no long-term plan. In Budget 2013 we said that we would talk to Albertans about our long-term savings, and over the last year the Alberta government consulted with Albertans in a number of ways, including the two economic summits I mentioned, budget consultations in 11 Alberta communities, the online survey, and conversations with their MLAs. Albertans told us to find a balance between consistently saving for the future and using part of our savings now for strategic, future-oriented investments that would benefit Albertans and the Alberta economy, much as they do in their own homes and their own businesses, Mr. Speaker. We listened, and on Monday we introduced Bill 1, the Savings Management Act.

Under Bill 1 government is building upon its existing innovation infrastructure by committing \$1.4 billion to enhance Alberta's innovative and labour market capacities. The bill creates targeted endowments that won't just grow for Albertans but will work for them. These endowments are designed to foster innovation, strengthen our economy, help solve complex social problems, and position Alberta to capitalize on future strategic opportunities.

We've established two new innovation endowments. The social innovation endowment will bring more capacity to the social service and culture sector to innovate and collaborate when resolving challenging social issues. It will support new ideas, risk-sharing, and creative collaboration with the nonprofit sector. The agriculture and food innovation endowment has been established to promote sustained growth in the agriculture and food processing sector. This endowment will fund key activities such as expanding research grants and promoting value-added product development and commercialization. Agriculture is key to our province, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 1 also enhances the Alberta heritage scholarship fund to better address our major challenge of attaining skilled tradespeople when confronted with a critical labour shortage. The enhancements to the fund will be dedicated to trades-focused education and will help apprentices complete their programs, engage industry, and encourage excellence in the apprenticeship system.

We have also established the new Alberta future fund, which will support strategic investments that provide long-term benefits to Albertans and the Alberta economy. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta future fund honours the legacy of Premier Peter Lougheed, who established the heritage fund in 1976 with three objectives: saving for the future, strengthening and diversifying the economy, and improving the quality of life for all Albertans. Through the heritage fund Premier Lougheed established the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research in 1980, which transformed medical research in this province. Today, nearly a quarter century later, we are following in his footsteps with new heritage-driven endowments.

3:50

Just as we are honouring Premier Lougheed with a 10-year, \$70 million commitment to create the Lougheed leadership institute, we are honouring his spirit with Bill 1, Mr. Speaker.

Success for future generations is also tied to the success of our energy industry. When I talk about the success, I'm not only referring to Alberta but to the entire country. All Canadians benefit from the revenue and the jobs created by Alberta's energy resources.

Our building Alberta plan makes real strides to further open new markets for these resources and other exports. Mr. Speaker, we need to find ways to go beyond our borders, across the ocean, and into new markets in order to get the best prices for Alberta's products. This continues to be job one for this government. Our Premier continues to lead the charge when it comes to opening these doors, whether it's advocating for approval of the Keystone XL pipeline in the U.S., building new opportunities in promising markets like India, or working with other Premiers to develop a Canadian energy strategy that would not just benefit Alberta but all of Canada.

In terms of our energy resources it's also vital that government and industry maintain a balance between economic success and environmental stewardship. We know that they are not mutually exclusive, and we will ensure that sustainable, environmentally responsible development goes hand in hand with the growth of our energy industry.

Budget 2014 allocates about 2 and a half billion per year in operational expense to advance Alberta's world-leading resource stewardship. We're focused on two critical areas: an integrated resource management system and expanded market access for Alberta's products. This funding includes \$59 million this year and a total of \$208 million over three years for Alberta's contribution to the new Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency. It also includes \$230 million in 2014-15 for the first full fiscal year of operations for the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Building relationships is also critical to our success in opening new markets for Alberta products. This budget supports these efforts through investments in Alberta's international strategy, funding for agriculture support, and funding to enhance our relationship with and provide economic opportunities for our First Nations and Métis people in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I am excited about the work ahead, and I am very proud to be a part of this government at this time in our history as we present this budget, as we build a stronger Alberta for the future. I can predict with confidence that if we continue down the path we've set, Albertans will have the roads, the schools, and the hospitals they need. If we continue to follow this road around that bend, Alberta's economy will gain even greater rewards from our resources as we expand into new and emerging markets, and if we continue on this path, we will have a diverse economy built on

innovation, one that attracts investment from around the world and provides jobs and other opportunities, exciting opportunities, to all who choose Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to moving Alberta into this future. Budget 2014 will drive the next phase of our building Alberta plan with an even sharper focus on expanding our economy, driving innovation, and working every day to create an even better quality of life for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we will make sure Alberta has the skilled workforce and the training opportunities to keep growing our economy, and we will build an innovative and diversified economy so we are well positioned for the future.

We will balance the budget by challenging every dollar we spend through the results-based budgeting process. We will continue to have surplus, Mr. Speaker, and we will strengthen front-line health care and drive down wait times by establishing more family care clinics. We will build the next phase of new and expanded schools in our fastest growing communities to keep class sizes low and rebuild in communities affected by floods, including undertaking projects to better protect communities from future flood damage.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue making streets safer and focusing on bullying and crime, and we will open new markets for Alberta's resources and products. With Budget 2014 we're preparing for bigger growth. We're preparing for success. Make no mistake: the government has a plan not just for today, not just for tomorrow but for the next generation or two of Albertans. Our commitment to the future is one of the reasons Albertans chose this government, and it's why more people from across Canada and from around the world are choosing to live here. We are the people's choice.

It's both an honour and a privilege to present Budget 2014 to the Assembly today, and I look forward to supporting this budget in this House. May God bless Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

The hon. opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30, March 10, 2014.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:56 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to March 06, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

- 1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., adjourned)
- 2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
- 3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
- 4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)**
First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
- 201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 ()**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
- 202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 10, 2014

Issue 5

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
Dallas, Hon. Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (W)
Dorward, David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-Calder (ND),
New Democrat Opposition Whip
Fawcett, Hon. Kyle, Calgary-Klein (PC)
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Fraser, Hon. Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Hon. Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
Hughes, Hon. Ken, Calgary-West (PC)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),
Liberal Opposition Whip
Kennedy-Glans, Hon. Donna, QC, Calgary-Varsity (PC)
Khan, Stephen, St. Albert (PC)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Leader of the New Democrat Opposition
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)
McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
New Democrat Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)
Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Hon. Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Premier
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC),
Government Whip
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 60

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

Executive Council

Alison Redford	Premier, President of Executive Council
Dave Hancock	Deputy Premier, Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Human Services
Robin Campbell	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta
Rick Fraser	Associate Minister – Public Safety
	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Service Alberta
Fred Horne	Minister of Health
Doug Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Ken Hughes	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Sandra Jansen	Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Education, Ministerial Liaison to the Canadian Forces
Donna Kennedy-Glans	Associate Minister – Electricity and Renewable Energy
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Ric McIver	Minister of Infrastructure
Diana McQueen	Minister of Energy
Frank Oberle	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dave Quest	Associate Minister – Seniors
Dave Rodney	Associate Minister – Wellness
Donald Scott	Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation
Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Khan
Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Fenske	Young
Hehr	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 10, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

May the scruples by which we abide be evident in our words and actions, may the disagreements we encounter become tools for amelioration, and may we always be blessed with wisdom to make the right choices on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee. [applause]

The Speaker: We don't normally applaud after the anthem. However, on this occasion we allow it because Mr. Clark, of course, has just signed on to be our regular Monday leader of *O Canada*. Congratulations and thank you.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day Message from the Queen

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you would all know, today is March 10, and that is Commonwealth Day. I have a message for you and for all Commonwealth nations from Her Majesty the Queen, head of the Commonwealth.

In her own words, Her Majesty says the following.

In July this year, the opening of the 20th Commonwealth Games will be marked by the arrival in Glasgow of the baton that started its journey from Buckingham Palace five months ago.

Many of us are following closely the news of the baton relay as it passes through the 70 countries and territories whose teams will gather for the Games. The images bring vividly to life what we mean by the Commonwealth family: it is wonderful to see the warmth, shared endeavour and goodwill as the baton is passed through the hands of many thousands of people.

Affinities of history and inheritance from the past are strong, yet we are bound together by a sense that the Commonwealth is a powerful influence of good for the future. People of all ages from different cultures are weaving an ever-growing network of links which connect us in our diversity and our common purpose. It is this unity that is expressed in this year's theme: 'Team Commonwealth'.

While national teams will be concentrating on the competition in August, Team Commonwealth will have a longer focus, working together to achieve a more enduring success.

Experiences of life differ widely throughout the Commonwealth, and we each make contributions from sometimes very different viewpoints. But we are committed to the same goals. Together we offer each other encouragement and draw strength from this mutual support.

The understanding that we belong together, and are able, through teamwork, to achieve far more than we could do alone, has always been at the heart of our approach. For all of us this is now captured in the Commonwealth Charter which sets out the values and principles which guide and motivate us.

This year, more children and young people are participating in Commonwealth Day celebrations. Advances in technology enable us to reach a greater number of young people in schools, on-line using the 'Commonwealth Class' initiative, and through events in local communities where the Commonwealth flag is being raised.

I am delighted that in this, the year of 'Team Commonwealth', we will be working to build a brighter, united future in which every one of us can play a part and share in its rewards.

Signed by Her Majesty, our Queen.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Neil Ferrer, the consul general of the Republic of the Philippines; Mrs. Melanie Rita Diano, consul of the Republic of the Philippines; and Mrs. Esmeralda Agbulos, who, of course, is the honorary consul general of the Republic of the Philippines.

Last November the Philippines experienced a devastating typhoon, deeply affecting our friends in the Philippines. This typhoon not only impacted Alberta's Filipino community but all Albertans, and we continue to send our thoughts as communities in the Philippines work to rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and the Philippines have a long-standing trade, investment, and cultural relationship. In fact, Alberta and the Philippines benefit from close to \$90 million of two-way trade annually. We'll continue to work together to strengthen these ties so both of our jurisdictions can thrive today, tomorrow, and in the future.

I would now ask Consul General Ferrer and his delegation to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this Commonwealth Day 2014, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House members of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Edmonton branch. This organization has evolved since its founding in 1868. The Edmonton branch, founded in 2005, is very active in promoting an appreciation of a modern, progressive, and dynamic Commonwealth and the basic principles for which it stands – tolerance, diversity, freedom, justice, democracy, human rights, and sustainable development – to a generation living in an increasingly interconnected world. I had the distinct privilege to be the guest speaker at the society's dinner this past Saturday.

Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Joe Zasada, chair; Mr. Alex Tsang, vice-chair; Dr. John Slade, treasurer; Tara Ferris, director of education; Margaret Day, director of membership; and Jennifer Reiz, secretary. I would ask all our guests to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some special members of Alberta's French-speaking community. Alors que notre province souligne le début des Rendez-vous de la

Francophonie du 7 au 23 mars, je tiens à vous présenter quelques merveilleux individus qui contribuent à la Francophonie albertaine. Earlier today I along with the hon. Speaker and the Deputy Premier and many of the members here had the opportunity to kick off Rendez-vous, which celebrates French language and culture across Canada.

Se joignant à nous pour cet événement et assis dans nos galeries sont des représentants de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta: M. Jean Johnson, président de l'ACFA, et M. Denis Perreaux, directeur général. Please rise as I say your names.

Also in the gallery are representatives from Canadian Parents for French, the Alberta branch of a pan-Canadian association that aims to promote, support, and enhance French immersion and core French programs. Bienvenue à M. Richard Slevinsky, president of CPF Alberta; Carole Anctil-Michalyszyn, vice-president of CPF national; Victoria Wishart, secretary; Candace Rogers, director from Edmonton; and Michael Tryon, executive director. CPF Alberta has more than 3,500 members and 33 chapters across the province.

1:40

Finally, I want to acknowledge some staff members from the Francophone Secretariat: Mme Cindie LeBlanc, executive director of the Francophone Secretariat, and M. Rhéal Poirier, community liaison officer. I wish these individuals des bonnes célébrations and ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Did you also have a school group to introduce, Madam Minister?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Je vous remercie, M. le Président. Il me fait grand plaisir de prendre la parole et de vous présenter, à vous et aux membres de cette Assemblée, 56 élèves des quatrième et sixième années de l'école Holy Cross Académie Internationale, une école d'immersion française située dans ma circonscription. Les étudiants sont ici avec Laura Kunce, Albert Tshakatumba, et Emilia Borruso. Avec Ms Laura Kunce, qui les a accompagné à la guitare, ils nous ont entouré avec leur performance magnifique dans la rotonde dans le cadre des célébrations de la 16e édition des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie et ont chanté *O Canada* et *Je voudrais voir la mer*. Mes chers élèves, félicitations pour une performance magnifique et pour vos efforts à maîtriser l'autre langue officielle du Canada. Je voudrais demander aux élèves de se lever pour recevoir l'accueil chaleureux et traditionnel de l'Assemblée.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members a group of 95 students and teachers from Richard Secord elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are seated both in the members' gallery and in the public gallery. These students have just participated in a mock Legislature. Richard Secord is a tremendous school, of which we are very proud, in Edmonton-Rutherford. Accompanying these students are their teachers Mrs. Eaton, Miss Biette, Mr. Girard, Mrs. Chalia, and Mrs. Dempster. I'd ask the students and their teachers and parent helpers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 27 students from St. Angela elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Daniel Jackson. This school is here all week participating in the School at the Leg., so if you see them wandering around, please say hi. Please give them a warm welcome now from the Legislature.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on, then, with the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly several excellent student leaders from the Alberta Students' Executive Council, or ASEC. These young, dedicated leaders will be meeting with several MLAs over the next two weeks to discuss issues affecting postsecondary education in our province. ASEC represents students from most Alberta colleges and technical institutes as well as Athabasca, MacEwan, and Mount Royal universities and Concordia University College of Alberta. We are committed to listening to students and their concerns because postsecondary education plays a significant role in our building Alberta plan, and it's important that students are included when we discuss the future direction of Campus Alberta.

I'd like to introduce to you the following individuals seated in the members' gallery and ask them to stand when I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Carol Neuman, executive director, ASEC; Teresa Currig, stakeholder relations, ASEC; Kenneth Taylor, vice-president external, SAIT Students' Association; Martin Cruz, president, Red Deer College Students' Association; Bethany Tynes, vice-president external, Athabasca University Students' Union; Andrew Koning, students' association president, Concordia University College. They were joined today by Daryn Rainer, vice-president external, NAIT Students' Association. Meagan Strachan, vice-president of academic, NAIT Students' Association couldn't join us this afternoon. They have risen, and I'd ask you to give them our traditional warm welcome and thank them for the work that they do.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly an outstanding Albertan, Dr. David Schindler. Dr. Schindler recently retired after an exemplary career in research and teaching at the University of Alberta of more than 24 years. He's the recipient of 11 honorary doctorate degrees and numerous other academic awards. I'll be honouring him in the House this afternoon with a member's statement. Dr. Schindler is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Velvet Martin. Velvet's daughter Samantha had a rare genetic disorder, and Alberta child services demanded that Samantha be placed in the foster system as the sole means of accessing medical care. Samantha had not been examined by a doctor for three years, got sick, and eventually died of a cardiac arrest. In the courts Velvet fought and won a publication ban of Samantha's circumstances so she could again utter her daughter's name in public. Her advocacy has resulted in Samantha's law. Velvet is a champion for our children who desperately need help and care. I would ask Velvet to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce today Mr. Len Thom, who's a very, very good friend of mine. We can talk politics. We can talk business. We can talk law. We can even talk about the Oilers and hockey and many other sports.

An Hon. Member: Hairstyles.

Mr. Dorward: We talk about hairstyles on occasion. Mr. Len Thom is the president of the PC association of Gold Bar, in my area, and, as I said, a very, very good friend. Mr. Thom, if you could rise please and receive the warm response of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly two members of my family, who are joining us in the public gallery today. The first is my daughter Angela Cardinal, who along with her family are four of the 100,000 people who moved to Alberta in 2013. Angela is a professional engineer practising here in Edmonton, and I'm so proud of her and so pleased that they're much closer to home. She's joined by her father-in-law, Dr. Raynald Cardinal, a chiropractor and a passionate organic farmer. He practises his medical profession both in Quebec and Ontario, and he farms on the border between the two. We have interesting conversations about my Bill 201. This is the first time for both of them watching any proceedings in the Legislature, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have two more introductions. Let's try and squeeze them in.

Edmonton-Calder, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members here today someone who certainly is very well known, at least in my family. He's a writer, he's a traveller, and he's recently moved back here, Stewart McLean, that Stewart MacLean, my cousin who lives in Sherwood Park. I would like him to rise here, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rogers: Merci, M. le Président. Je vous présente ma première fille. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my oldest daughter, Candace Rogers. Candace is a product of the French immersion system in this province. She is a graduate of Campus Saint-Jean, and she now serves as head of recruiting. She has been introduced earlier as a member of the board of CPF Alberta. I'm extremely proud of Candace. Candace Rogers, please rise.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Provincial Borrowing

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier once said that it's not debt; it's hope. If that's the case, Budget 2014 is the most hope-filled budget in 20 years. This government will borrow nearly \$22 billion by 2016, all but wiping out Alberta's reputation as a leader in fiscal management. Most importantly, Alberta taxpayers will be

on the hook for \$820 million a year in interest payments alone. That's \$820 million that won't be available to hire teachers, to reduce health care wait times, or to look after our seniors. To the Premier: why is she saddling future generations with so much debt?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of groups in the province that understand the financial situation that we're in, and that is that we are in the best financial situation of any jurisdiction in this country. I'll quote the chair of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, himself a chartered accountant.

We see this as being a very solid and forward-looking budget... If we were going to operate solely on a cash basis, we wouldn't be able to manage the increase in population that we see in a year-over-year basis... It's very important that we... borrow to build this infrastructure.

If they were to pay cash, they would cut a billion dollars out of Education, cut a billion dollars out of Health. How are they going to pay for it?

Ms Smith: We'd cut unnecessary travel and other unnecessary expenses.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier also once said, "Debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments. Debt has proven the death of countless dreams." Later on she was even more specific. She said: Alberta does not have debt, and we will not incur debt. Those quotes are barely two years old. Now here we are, and this Premier is set to plunge us back into debt levels that we have not seen since the early 1990s. We all remember those dark days. To the Premier: why did she break her promise on debt?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, one of the Premier's promises is that we will build the schools, we will build the hospitals, we will build the roads, we will do the things that you do when you're a growing province. The debt that we are taking on is capital debt. We cannot borrow for operating. We've been very clear with that. There are four rules around that debt. We capped it. This is an argument that they tried to put forward last year. They've lost their deficit argument. Now they're going on this argument.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, if they're so impressed with their level of debt, it makes me wonder why it is that they're going to great lengths to hide this debt. They've reworked the entire provincial budget to try to sweep it under the rug and trick Albertans into believing that there is a surplus, which doesn't actually exist. But Albertans are smarter than that. They see through this government's spin, and they know that this budget is not balanced. To the Premier: why does she continue to insult Albertans' intelligence with phony surpluses and hidden debt?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member wasn't listening to the Budget Address because in the Budget Address I actually made it very clear that we were going to be borrowing for capital projects this year. I also made it very clear that the consolidated surplus of \$1.1 billion is calculated in exactly the same way that the federal government does it, that the provincial governments of B.C., Ontario, and all of the other budgets do it. If Minister Flaherty is wrong, then I guess we are wrong, but he's not.

The Speaker: The hon. leader, second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: It's certainly not calculated the way Mr. Dinning used to calculate it back in the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, this government is now bringing in more revenues than ever before. We are projected to bring in \$44.4 billion in Budget 2014. That's \$5 billion more than they budgeted last year.

In fact, Alberta now takes in as much revenue as British Columbia despite having half a million fewer people, but apparently that's just not enough for this government. Despite having record revenues, this government still can't balance the budget or stay out of debt. To the Premier: why do we need to borrow billions when we have way more money than we ever had before?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that B.C. is losing people. We are gaining people. We are growing. We will be the third-most populous province in this country in no short order. Here's the CIBC's analysis of it.

In general, direct borrowing has triggered an increase in provincial liabilities.

That's true.

However, Alberta has implemented a prudent debt management framework, including a cap on borrowing, the setting aside of revenue for associated interest costs and the establishment of debt repayment funds to fully cover future capital-related maturities. Moreover, with large and growing financial assets, Alberta remains the sole province without any net debt – a unique financial . . .

Ms Smith: Imagine that, a bank encouraging someone to borrow more money.

Mr. Speaker, this government's spin isn't fooling anybody. No matter how many fancy tricks this government tries to pull on the budget, Albertans know at the end of the day that there are only two columns that matter: total money coming in and total money going out. Of course, this government has done all it can to make it impossible to calculate those two columns, and it's obvious why. So tell us again, Premier: how can we have a budget surplus when the money going out is at least \$2.7 billion more than the money coming in?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the first quote that I read to you was not from a bank; it was from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, who are the business owners across this province and actually know how to create economic wealth.

The second thing I'm going to say, Mr. Speaker, is that the federal government suggests that they have a \$2.9 billion deficit. They are borrowing \$95 billion this year. Is the hon. member across the way suggesting that the federal government is lying about the deficit situation that they are in today? I think not.

The other thing that I would tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that there are people in this province who are looking for their new school. There are people in this province who are looking for the road being fixed. That's what this budget does.

Ms Smith: There are people in this province that are looking for a single, consolidated set of books, Mr. Speaker.

Let's make this simple. Since the Finance minister likes his household analogy, say a family brings in \$4,300 a month. They stick to their budget, spending \$4,000 on things like rent and car and groceries, leaving them a modest \$300 surplus. But instead of banking it, they go out and buy a car and a computer and new furniture, all on their credit card, increasing their payments by \$600 a month. So now they've got \$4,300 coming in, \$4,600 going out. Here's a trick question for the Finance minister: is that family budget balanced?

Mr. Horner: Absolutely not, because they are . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I'm glad they finally figured it out, because not included in her \$4,300 budget was the price of their house. They didn't pay for it all in one month. They made the payment. That's how they balance the budget.

It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that that party opposite won't even tell Albertans how they plan to pay for their capital plan. I find it interesting that they actually separated their capital plan from their operating plan in their alternative budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: It's a 10-year, debt-free, \$50 billion capital plan within a single, consolidated budget.

Provincial Budget

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're not the only ones baffled by the government's fiscal incompetence. Mayor Don Iveson and Mayor Nenshi were disappointed to learn that Budget 2014 contained no money for improving the cities' LRT networks despite promises to the contrary. Paraphrasing one commentator on Twitter: record revenues, record debt, and no LRT; what gives? To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that we have record revenue and we are spending more money than ever before, what is he telling mayors Iveson and Nenshi? What gives?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I'm pleased to report that I have a very constructive, engaged relationship with the two mayors of the large cities. We've talked about a lot of different topics, including how we ensure that these world-class cities are funded appropriately for what we are asking them to do.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. You didn't have to check Twitter.

Mr. Hughes: We didn't have to check Twitter.

Ms Smith: This government should stop making promises they cannot keep. The Deputy Premier is in charge of negotiations with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Now, that's a tough job at the best of times. I can imagine that that job didn't become any easier when the Premier's own budget got a juicy 10 per cent increase in Budget 2014, to say nothing of the Premier's well-documented personal travel preferences. To the Deputy Premier: does he think the Premier's personal pampering of herself will help him or hurt him in his efforts to convince the public-sector unions to take less?

The Speaker: Just be careful with questions that solicit opinion. That one does.

Mr. Hancock: Well, not only is it soliciting an opinion, it is making an egregious comment that's entirely untoward and entirely uncalled for. The real question is: do Albertans want to get timely, quality, accurate information from their government? The answer is yes. In order to do that, do we need to have people who will receive those letters, receive those comments, and respond to them with accurate information? Yes. That's why the Premier's office and the Premier need the ability to communicate with the public.

Also, Mr. Speaker, people want to come to this province. We go out to sell Alberta across the world, to tell the world about Alberta, but we also want people to come to Alberta to see what we have here, to see what's happening in the oil sands. That costs money, and Albertans want . . .

2:00

Ms Smith: Well, that's certainly not what I'm hearing, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education must at least take some comfort in this budget because the fuzzy math curriculum that he's pushing to Alberta's classrooms appears to have made it to the cabinet table. There's no other way to explain how a deficit can become a surplus if not for a stunning lack of basic math skills. To the Education minister: does he support his government's new-math budget, or is this the kind of faulty addition and subtraction that they are going to be teaching to our children?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely support this budget because it's putting classrooms out there for students. You know, it's interesting that when we're in here, we get questioned about the capital – they don't want the schools; they don't want them borrowed – yet when we're out in the constituency, the only question we get is: where do we stand for the sod-turning, and where do we stand for the photo op? On the front page of the *Airdrie Echo* you'll note last year the Member for Airdrie was there turning sod on a government building, a P3 financed school. I guess it's okay to borrow capital, borrow funds for schools as long as it's in their constituency.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's go on to the leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Premier's Office Budget

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier refused to pay back the \$45,000 she wasted on her South Africa trip. Now we learn that in Budget 2014 spending in the Premier's office is up \$1.2 million, nearly a 10 per cent increase for the imperial court. Meanwhile this government slashes the child health benefit by 6 per cent and the seniors' drug plan by a whopping 25 per cent. To the Premier: why is your office budget so much more important than Alberta's seniors and children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, by phrasing the question in that way, the hon. member is obviously misunderstanding entirely what's happening with the Seniors budget and the other budgets. I can tell him what I told the Leader of the Opposition. Albertans contact this government. They want to tell us what they're thinking. They want responses, and they want them on a timely basis. We make no apologies for giving Albertans timely, accurate information about what's actually happening in this province. The Premier's office and the Premier want to have others come from around the world to see what's happening in Alberta because they make investments in Alberta, they come and work in Alberta, and they buy our products. It's important to be able to host them . . .

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder we're going into debt. They don't know how to do math. A cut is a cut, and a \$1.2 million increase in the budget is an increase.

According to the imperial court itself \$400,000 of this increase is for hosting expenses. Assuming our famously well-travelled Premier were to stick around from Monday to Friday every week, she would still be spending \$1,500 a day on entertaining, all this while taking a let them eat cake approach to our children, our seniors, and public-sector servants. To the Premier: just how much champagne, caviar, and foie gras do you and your inner circle need?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes light of what's a very important piece of public work. It's not champagne and caviar. It's about bringing the world to Alberta to see what we have here. It's about making sure that people from the United States understand what the oil sands looks like, understand what happens in Alberta and are prepared to invest here, to work here, to come here, to travel and to spend their money here, sometimes to relocate here, but also to buy our products. It's not just about going out and selling to the world. It's also about having the world come to Alberta. [interjections] That's not champagne and caviar. It's good public work.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, advice to this government: investing in our children, treating our seniors with dignity and respect, and investing in front-line public servants is the best investment we can make as a society.

Of the \$1.2 million increase to the Premier's \$11.6 million budget \$300,000 will be spent on scribes tasked with replying to what must surely be a mountain of incoming correspondence. [interjections] To the Premier: if you are getting so many angry letters about Travelgate, wouldn't it be more cost-effective just to pay back the 45,000 bucks instead of wasting another 300 grand?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it may well be possible that that hon. member can answer all his letters on a Friday afternoon within an hour, but I can tell you from experience in this government that Albertans contact their government on a daily basis. They want information. They want accurate and quality information. They want to give the government their ideas about how we should do things, and we want to hear them and listen to them, and we want to respond to them. [interjections] There is nothing improper with that. That's actually how government works. The hon. member ought to know that because he did have a short mentorship in that area, but he's obviously forgotten what he learned.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's getting increasingly more difficult to hear the questions and to hear the answers. When you hear your own colleagues having to shout their questions out and you hear colleagues on this side having to shout their answers out, clearly the noise level has escalated beyond what it should be. Let's try and keep it down, shall we?

To demonstrate how we do that, let's go to Edmonton-Calder.

Misericordia Community Hospital

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is leaving the front-line staff to prop up the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton while the facility crumbles around them. Last month the CBC released photographs showing the building hardly fit for habitation, let alone hospital work. Staff complain about the intensive care unit. Meant to be there for only two more years, it's still in use after 13 years. To the Minister of Health: why is there no immediate action for the Misericordia hospital in this year's budget?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is immediate action for the Misericordia hospital. As I'm sure all members in this House know, particularly those from the capital region, the Misericordia is one of our oldest and one of the proudest hospitals that we have in the city. A total of \$19 million has already been allocated for critical infrastructure repair at the Misericordia. I've asked Alberta

Health Services to work with Covenant Health to identify what other resources may be needed in the next five years.

Mr. Eggen: This budget: you needed to use it as a starting point, to start building a new hospital at the Misericordia. The patients and their families know how bad the hospital is. They see it every day. Staff working in the ICU certainly know how bad it is. Why is this government subjecting Albertans to dangerous and unhealthy conditions at the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, that last statement is patently untrue and completely irresponsible. The care that is provided at the Misericordia hospital is safe care. It's of high quality. It's comparable to any other hospital in this province.

We know and the hon. member as an MLA in this city should know that the city of Edmonton is going to need additional hospital capacity in the very near future. We're working on that. I'm working on that with the Minister of Infrastructure. In the meantime we are flowing very significant funds to Covenant Health to keep the facility running and in good repair.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the physical structure of this hospital requires immediate attention. By any measure of logic or science or health this facility does not make the grade. Will the minister please tell us what motivates this government to ignore the sad state of this Edmonton hospital? Is it politics? Money? Denial? Why don't you just fix the hospital?

Mr. Horne: We are fixing the hospital instead of spending our time, as the hon. member is doing, attempting to scare patients and staff and bring the facility into disrepute. Mr. Speaker, \$19.2 million as a contribution to critical infrastructure repair is a very significant contribution. There are other facilities across the province that also have needs. We're working to address all of those. Edmonton will see a new hospital in the very near future. As I said, I'm working with the Minister of Infrastructure on that very issue right now.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The first five spots have now gone by, which means no more preambles, please, to supplementals, starting with Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Highway 63 Safety

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over a year ago the government accepted recommendation 12 from my report entitled *Towards a Safer 63*, which called for dedicated RCMP and sheriff traffic enforcement as well as aerial enforcement. This increased presence has succeeded in increasing the number of charges laid, and I've heard comments from my constituents that there's been a noticeable improvement in driver behaviour. But I do hear that regardless of these efforts, the worst offenders are now commercial traffic, and many have not changed their dangerous driving habits. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: given the higher percentage of commercial traffic on highway 63, what percentage of fatal accidents involve commercial vehicles and what percentage of tickets . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The data for 2013 is not available yet, but for 2012 3.6 per cent of casualty collisions in Alberta involved commercial vehicles, down 1.4 per cent from

the year before. Again, the commercial vehicle inspectors work very hard to look at defects involving commercial vehicles. The vast majority of the commercial vehicle accidents, though, involve actual driver error or speed and not defects to the commercial vehicles.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that there's a significant volume of wide-load and commercial traffic on highway 63, what is the ratio of commercial vehicle enforcement to civilian enforcement?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, that isn't available for 2013. The member is quite correct in that we do work very hard, specifically with the report that he authored, and we will continue to do so, particularly as we move forward to twin highway 63, which is something being done by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Allen: Again to the same minister: what measures have you taken to discourage traffic offences by commercial vehicles on highway 63 as well as on all of Alberta's highways?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Officers with the integrated traffic units in the commercial vehicle enforcement branch regularly patrol highway 63 and often include many checkstops. We are dedicated to making highway 63 safer as well as all highways throughout the four corners of Alberta.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the serious allegations of electricity price manipulation in Alberta the opposition has tried twice now to get a straight answer from this government on its policy dealing with companies that withhold electricity from the market in order to raise the price of electricity. So we need to try one more time. To the minister: is it the policy of this government to allow companies to withhold electricity from the market in order to raise prices?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is so tempting for me to go down this rabbit hole with this member and dig into these questions being looked at by the AUC, but we both know that to do so would put the AUC's independent considerations of these allegations at risk, and I just won't do it.

Mr. Anglin: It's got nothing to do with the allegations.

Given that Albertans have a right to a straight answer and given that the market needs clarity, again to the minister: is it permissible in Alberta's electricity market to withhold electricity from the market to raise the price of electricity? Yes or no?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Mr. Speaker, I would say that it would be very clear to this particular member, who is very familiar with this system, that the values of the system – fairness, efficiency, open competition – remain as true today as the day this legislation was drafted. They're essential values that ensure the integrity of this system and protect consumers, residential and small businesses. That should be the priority of all of us, including this member.

Mr. Anglin: Well, let's talk about integrity of the system. Given that a straight answer could save Albertans millions of dollars in

lengthy hearing costs and given that electricity companies deserve clarification, again to the minister: is it legal for a company to withhold electricity from the market in an effort to raise the price of electricity? Yes or no?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Mr. Speaker, this member knows that this place is not where this issue is going to be adjudicated. [interjections] This member seems to be the only person suggesting that the AUC is not the right venue for this issue to be reviewed. I'd also like to point out that this member has from time to time commented very positively on the AUC's capacity to look at these kinds of issues. So I'm alarmed at his lack of consistency here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's Commonwealth Day. Let's be nice, please.

Let's go on to Calgary-Bow, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Workforce Planning

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is for the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. New numbers show that Alberta's unemployment rate is 4.3 per cent. Now, while we can all be excited that Albertans have jobs, this is also a challenge. Are we essentially at full employment, and are shortages just around the corner?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy in a sense to report that our official rate of unemployment is 4.3 per cent, which most economists in most places in the world would argue is full, frictional employment. The federal government has just recently credited us for creating in the province of Alberta 80 per cent of all jobs created in Canada last year.

But that, Mr. Speaker, even as it is great news, also brings its own difficulties. Even though we have full employment, there are still Albertans that are marginalized or may not have the skills required to fill some of these jobs, and that is something that we will continue to work on not only as a province but also with the federal government.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. This supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. The budget is based on the building Alberta plan and assumptions of future economic growth. What risks do job numbers like this pose to this growth?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is one of the very high risks within the economy of Alberta. In fact, today I spoke to the Chambers of Commerce, who, by the way, gave us a qualified balance sheet description of the surplus, so the accountants know what's going on. It is one of the things that the chamber is concerned about. In fact, the chambers in Calgary and Edmonton and the Alberta chambers have all said to us that one of the things we need to do is to attract more people to our province, train more people. That's what Bill 1 is all about. We need to talk to the federal government about getting more people to come into our province, because even with 105,000 people we actually lowered our unemployment rate.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Back to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what are you doing to ensure that we are dealing with the economic threat of skills shortages?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working with our postsecondary education system, making sure that the students who graduate from schools have the skills required to fill the jobs. We're working with our marginalized groups – our aboriginal community, persons with disabilities, and often women who find it difficult to get back to work – though groups like Women Building Futures. Also, yes, temporary foreign workers are important. However, I have to tell you that I am much more inclined to be supportive of permanent foreign workers as opposed to temporary foreign workers.

Mr. McAllister: I know it's Commonwealth Day, but surely we can do a little better than that, Mr. Speaker.

School Construction

Mr. McAllister: We've been asking the Minister of Education about his New Age, wishy-washy math curriculum a lot lately. A careful reading of the budget, though, suggests that his issues with math might be more serious than we first thought. You see, this government promised to build 50 schools and renovate 70 more this term. They claim that it will cost \$2 billion, but when you add up the money committed to these schools in the budget, it comes to just over half of that. Is the Education minister aware that his school promises don't add up for Albertans, or is this some sort of New Age mathematics?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member: I'm actually grateful for a good question today. Thank you. The fact is that the budget talks about – in fact, we did a release that said that the schools will cost in the neighbourhood of \$2 billion. There's \$1.2 billion in the budget. The reason is that we haven't put the contracts out, we haven't put the tenders out, we haven't even decided yet whether they're P3s or otherwise. A P3 can actually be paid out over as much as 30 years. So I'll just ask the hon. member to consider that, and as the contracts and the tenders go out, we will have those numbers, and the questions will be answered then.

Mr. McAllister: So many unanswered questions. It's like we're watching a soap opera in here with this government.

Given that the minister has made 50 announcements, planted 50 signs, done 50 photo ops and given that according to his own numbers he won't be delivering the 50 new schools that he promised on time, I would ask the minister: will he come clean with Albertans, and will he let us know which communities will not be getting their previously promised schools?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, under this Premier, with this government the building Alberta plan has promised 50 new and 70 renovated schools, and that's what we'll do. But I would also ask the hon. member: his members on that side have talked about how important it is to have an infrastructure list on their website. We certainly have one on ours. He hasn't got a single school listed on their website despite the fact that they come in this House all the time and protest and pound the table that they should be on there. They haven't promised any. This government is actually building them.

Mr. McAllister: Frankly, Mr. Speaker, the fearmongering by this side is as tired and old as the government itself.

Given that this government is relying on P3s to build more than half of their new schools, given that they're getting little to no

interest from contractors on this, will the Infrastructure minister change course, switch to the manageable and competitive design-and-build contracts, which the Wildrose has been lobbying for all along, so that we can finally do the right thing for Alberta and get some shovels into the ground?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member doesn't know whether it's Monday or Friday. He's talking out of both sides of his mouth. The fact is that we will make the decision. We will announce it. But I'm sad to see them against P3s when they've saved the taxpayers in this province over \$2 billion, when they've delivered projects on time and on budget, when they've given good quality infrastructure that Albertans can enjoy for years and years and years. Eighty-six thousand Albertan kids will enjoy the new and improved seats from the plan we have coming forward. That's what this government is doing with the building Alberta plan.

2:20

Mr. Hehr: Well, let me build on those questions. One of the key promises made by the Premier was that her government would build 50 new schools by 2016. Two years into this mandate not a single hole has been dug, no cement poured, nary a nail pounded. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that it takes three years to physically build a school. Clearly and in no uncertain terms, this government will fail to complete even one of these promised schools, much less 50. So to the Minister of Infrastructure: will you please come clean with the Alberta public and admit that these 50 new schools will not be complete by 2016?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. member's concern, but I would ask him to look at a little bit more information. I took the time on Friday last week to go through a school in Airdrie that's under construction. It's almost finished, in another couple of months. [interjections] The fact is that after about 16 months the school is almost complete. [interjections]

The Speaker: You know, I would have thought that constructing schools would be a very serious question requiring a serious answer. We've had one. Let's wait for the other one here. These interjections have to stop, folks, please. Let's show some respect for each other.

Hon. Minister, would you like to start over?

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just finish my thought.

The fact is that there are examples right now of schools built in well under two years. That's what we're challenged to do. There's no doubt that it's a challenge, but, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and this government promised under the building Alberta plan to get those schools done, and we are working feverishly to do so.

Mr. Hehr: Well, the answer given by the Minister of Infrastructure is simply laughable. Given that this government's own documents show an \$800 million shortfall in funding these new schools, how is the minister going to pay the construction workers to build these schools? With IOUs?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to reanswer the question I answered two or three questions ago, because the hon. member clearly needs to hear it twice to get it through whatever it has to get through. The fact is that the 50 and 70 schools are in the plan. When we do the contracts, we will work out, decide whether they're P3s or otherwise. We will get the schools built. As those contracts get firmed up, whether we decide on P3s, which could be paid out over 30 years – or as the Wildrose suggests, they could

be quicker under the other plan. As we do that, we will update the numbers. Today the numbers are not . . .

The Speaker: Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Hehr: No, no.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. One more supplemental. My apologies.

Mr. Hehr: Now, Mr. Speaker, given that it takes three years to build the new schools – that would take us to 2017 if the government started building them today – and given that even a kindergarten student knows that it takes money to build schools and given that this government doesn't have any, will the minister just admit that these schools will not be built by 2016? It's a pretty easy answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat again: under the building Alberta plan we've promised to do it. It's in our business plan. It's in our budget. We'll get it done.

But I'll actually give this hon. member credit for one thing, Mr. Speaker. He's quite forward and public about saying that he wants to raise taxes to build the infrastructure. Under this Premier and this government we're going to do it without raising taxes because that's what Albertans want.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Child Poverty Reduction Strategy

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, continuing on our theme of broken promises, the Premier claimed she would eliminate child poverty in five years. Now we've got the budget for three of those five years, and instead of concrete commitments we see more cuts and growing inequality. To the Minister of Human Services: almost 20 per cent of young children in Alberta live in oppressive poverty. Why doesn't he understand that the longer he waits to act, the more they will suffer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to be moving forth with creating a child poverty strategy, that will help us to ensure that all Albertans have access to all the opportunities that we know 82,000 new Albertans had last year, because Alberta produced 82,000 new jobs last year. Economic development and prosperity is one of the best ways to help people reach out from poverty, and we have a solid track record of that.

Ms Notley: More empty words.

Given that this year's budget contains massive cuts to services that lift families out of poverty such as income support for learners, adult upgrading, and training for work and given that you can't end child poverty without ending poverty for the families with whom those children live, can the minister explain how he thinks any Albertan will believe this government's claims when they have chosen to cut proven poverty-reduction mechanisms by up to 50 per cent? Shame.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the member would be well advised to know that the reason why there appears to be a decrease in that

part of the budget is because we're working on a new agreement with the federal government on the jobs grant. As soon as that agreement is signed, that money is there, that training is there, and more Albertans get more opportunities. This is the best place to be to reach out from poverty and achieve great economic success.

Ms Notley: Well, it's not there now.

Given that this government has received countless antipoverty reports from researchers, advocates, community agencies, and municipalities in the last five years and given that all of those reports say that neither income support nor the minimum wage are anywhere near adequate to provide for the families of the 90,000 Alberta children living in poverty, why won't this minister admit that this do-nothing provincial budget and its recipe for continued government inaction put responsibility for that child poverty directly at this government's feet?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, there are a variety of different tools that we are using to help Albertans that require support, whether it be the 25,000 Alberta children that receive subsidized daycare, whether it be the countless Albertans that receive income supports, the thousands of Albertans that receive training supports. The fact is that this is the place that has the lowest taxes of all the jurisdictions in this great country of Canada and pumps out 87 per cent of the new jobs in Canada. Alberta is growth and opportunity, and everybody shall see it.

Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, in the real world people who mismanage assets are fired, but in this PC government these people are promoted. The budget included \$1.8 billion for the southwest leg of the Calgary ring road, but when asked for a total cost, the Transportation minister was flippant, saying, quote, it will be less than \$10 billion and more than \$1.8 billion. How's that? Unquote. To the minister: do you have any idea what this project is going to cost? Two billion? Five billion? Ten billion? Twenty billion?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I remember doing that article with the journalist, and the journalist was trying to pin me down to say a number that we don't have yet, so I wasn't going to. That ring road won't be finished for seven or eight years. We don't know if it'll be a P3. We don't know all the land costs yet. So I don't have the exact answer to that question. Unlike those opposite, I don't say facts that I don't know.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The government members can thump their desks all they want, but does this government still believe that projects like the \$400 million federal building, renovated for PC MLAs, are a greater need than 20 schools that could have been built instead, are more important than 20 schools?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, on the federal building it's kind of interesting to hear the member from that party talking. Apparently, they think it's important because they're going to be in it. [interjections] It's important enough to them that they actually asked for a change order the other day, that would slow it down, add additional costs. [interjections] They can't decide whether it's important or not. This government, however, is building Alberta and putting in place . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: You know, there are times like this where you're just not sure what to do, right? So I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take away your last supplemental right now because there was considerably too much heckling going on over here. There was too much heckling going on over here. And then – guess what? – we had too much heckling going on over here, too, so I'm going to come back and penalize someone on this side when your turn comes as well. That will hopefully show you that I'm serious about having some order and decorum here in the House.

Mr. Anderson: Point of clarification.

The Speaker: Please have a seat, hon. member, okay? I'm taking away your supplemental, and I'll be taking one away here as well, all right? You'll address me at the end of question period.

Let's move on. Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

2:30

Native Grassland Conservation

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, or RAC, comprised of a broad-based group of 18 stakeholders, met over 18 months and made recommendations to the South Saskatchewan regional plan. The RAC detailed the need to protect grasslands conservation areas which are critical to grassland habitat in southern Alberta. They are the Wild Horse plains, the Twin River heritage rangeland extension, the South Saskatchewan River corridor, and the Bow River-Majorville upland corridor. This protection would have allowed continued use of grazing and resource extraction while preserving the natural areas. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Why does the South Saskatchewan regional plan not . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We consulted with Albertans, and the advice we received from the regional advisory council on this is a very important issue. During those consultations Albertans in the regions, including those in the grazing and ranching community, told us they did not support the development of conservation management areas for grasslands. This is due in large part to the good grazing practices of landowners and ranchers in this area, which have resulted in significant intact grasslands. Those well-managed cattle grazing and traditional practices of long-term grazing contribute greatly to the ecological health of this continent's finest remaining native grasslands.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: will your ministry remedy this oversight and take steps to protect the vital publicly owned grasslands in these specific areas mentioned by the RAC and in southern Alberta in general?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for his continued advocacy of this situation. However, we are indeed taking steps to protect grasslands under the regional plan for southern Alberta. We know that grasslands have a high ecological value for biodiversity and watershed protection, and we are committed to maintaining intact native grasslands as a high priority under the regional plan. We will implement footprint

management strategies and integrate other initiatives like conservation offsets and species-at-risk conservation programs. As well, we will work to minimize the conversion of grasslands to other uses. These are significant actions under the regional plan to help us conserve this vitally important southern Alberta landscape.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry to have to take away your second supplemental, but I'm taking one away from this side as I did from this side to be fair so that you will all know that I'm serious. Have a seat, please.

Let's go on. Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Stony Plain.

Travel Alberta Executive Expenses

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have seen PC ministers flying their family to the Olympics and a Premier who wastes money on flights, so it's no surprise that the CEO of Travel Alberta, who makes \$240,000 in salary plus \$150,000 in benefits, saw fit to bill taxpayers for a \$150 tuxedo rental as a hospitality expense. Will the minister ask the CEO to pay back this claim?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. You know, I just recently returned from the world's largest tourism and conference centre in Berlin, and while there we, including the CEO of Travel Alberta, met with a variety of officials from around the world in promoting Alberta as a tourism destination, promoting the 139,000 jobs, the 19,000 businesses, and the \$7.8 billion tourism industry.

These guys want our CEO to show up in suspenders and blue jeans.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll table the picture of the tuxedo on the CEO after question period.

Given that the Travel Alberta CEO expensed an \$830 meal at a very high-end restaurant in Banff, which the CEO then tweeted that eating there was, and I quote, one more check on the bucket list, does the minister not recognize that this is an open and blatant abuse of taxpayers' dollars?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. Travel Alberta, which during the course of the conference in Berlin won its 47th international award for trade and marketing, for an organization that only turns five years old on April 1, has done an outstanding job of promoting Alberta as a tourism destination throughout the world. In fact, we were told throughout our time in Berlin that Alberta remains on everybody's tourism bucket list, and that's the bucket list that we're really concerned about.

Mr. Strankman: Will it be your bucket list or theirs?

Given that taxpayers shouldn't be subsidizing the luxuries of government officials and given that taxpayers will be distressed to learn that Travel Alberta's CEO took an \$8,800 first-class flight to Singapore this past June just to have one dinner meeting with one applicant for a job, will the minister of tourism call on the Auditor General to get to the bottom of what's happening in Travel Alberta? This culture of entitlement has . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, the Auditor General reviews Travel Alberta along with all of the agencies within Tourism, Parks and Recreation on an annual basis. I'm proud to know and I'm proud to state that we have not had any negative

recommendations. It comes up at Public Accounts this Wednesday, and they'll have every opportunity to ask those questions.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that our tourism levy grows, and our tourism business grows. If it was up to those people over there, our brand would not be Remember to Breathe; it would be Just Try Not to Choke. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Some people don't think I'm serious. I'm very serious. I will take away more questions. I have the right to do that if I need to maintain law, order, and discipline in this Assembly, and that's what I'm going to do. So make no mistake about it. I warned you last week. I'll be clarifying it for Airdrie, I'm sure, at the end of question period if he asks. I'm just telling you again.

Please. I can appreciate that when somebody stands up, you want to pound your desks and give them a little moral support. When you hear a really good question or a really tough one or a really good answer, I can appreciate that you want to bang your desks and cheer them on a little bit then. I'm prepared to go along with that but not during the question itself and certainly not during the answer itself, please. It's rude; it's disrespectful.

You all saw the letter I sent you from one school. I could send you more from other schools who have now said that they're not even bringing their students here for question period anymore. How do you like that? That just happened last fall.

Let's go on. Stony Plain, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Services for Seniors

Mr. Lemke: Thank you. Every day 60 Albertans reach the age of 65. It is projected that by 2031, Mr. Speaker, 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior. On a daily basis I hear my constituents voice their concerns over the waiting lists that they are put on and the costs of living in these facilities. To the Associate Minister – Seniors: how are you building Alberta for the people that have worked their entire lives contributing to this province?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Member for Stony Plain for the question. I know he's a strong advocate for the seniors in his constituency and for all of his constituents.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the enormous contribution that our seniors make, and we remain committed to building an Alberta that meets their needs. Since 2010 we've undertaken an unprecedented expansion in continuing care. There have been 3,000 continuing care spaces built in this province, and another 2,000 are going to be built in the next two years. We're on target to deliver it. That's a 15 per cent increase since 2010. So there are many spaces coming for seniors and many great things to come.

Mr. Lemke: To the same minister: how do you plan on addressing the wait times that plague the seniors of Stony Plain?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we want to see that our seniors have timely access to continuing care services and supports no matter where they happen to live in the province. In Stony Plain there are 236 publicly funded continuing care spaces.

In addition to these spaces, one of the most effective ways we can reduce wait times is by providing more home care to people in the community. Since 2010 we have increased our investment in home care by more than \$100 million, or 24 per cent. Last year we invested more than half a billion dollars to help more than 108,000 Albertans get the care that they need staying in their own home.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What exactly are you doing to ensure that the new spaces are affordable and feasible for the seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Quest: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to providing publicly funded health care that's accessible to all Albertans regardless of their ability to pay, and that includes access to continuing care in our province. That's not going to change. As I mentioned, we've added thousands of spaces and we're adding thousands more for seniors that cannot meet their costs or are eligible for the Alberta seniors' benefit, which is somewhat unusual in Canada, and have provided more than \$320 million in assistance to these seniors last year alone. That includes supplementing benefits to ensure a minimum monthly disposable income.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mobile Dialysis Service

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Minister of Health is a complete and utter disaster. Lac La Biche was promised a dialysis bus. Then it was delayed. Then we finally got a dialysis bus, but there was no staff to run it. Then the bus broke down. It might actually be funny if it wasn't a matter of life and death. Now the bus just sits in front of the hospital. This leaves me wondering: why aren't the dialysis units being permanently moved from the bus into the hospital?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of communities across the province that are served by mobile dialysis service. What this has done is that it's allowed us to extend dialysis services to communities that do not have sufficient capacity within their hospital, whether it's a question of space or staff, in order to run a full-time dialysis unit. We'll be continuing to do this as we move into the future. The hon. member's constituency has obviously benefited from that service. Home dialysis is where we are headed in the future, and that will allow us to expand additional capacity.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are other communities such as Athabasca that could use a dialysis bus, why doesn't the government simply move the dialysis units from the bus into the Lac La Biche hospital to free up the bus so it could be used elsewhere like Athabasca?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's wonderful that the hon. member wants to advocate for a dialysis unit in his hospital. I'm sure that my colleague the Minister of Education and others in this House would also like to see that be a possibility. Unfortunately, we

aren't able to put in place fixed dialysis units in every hospital in the province. Instead, what we've done is that we've made the most of the mobile resources that we have, including staff, many of whom today are LPNs who have been specially trained to run dialysis equipment, who are going across the province delivering this much-needed service to people who require it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that northern Albertans who require dialysis must travel up to four hours each way to receive treatment and they don't have access to a government plane, doesn't the minister care that many people are being forced to move away from their homes, communities, and loved ones?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really difficult to understand whether this member is making a case to eliminate mobile dialysis services in the province, just trying to make a case for the hospital in his own constituency, or whether there's any glimmer of hope that he might be considering the needs of the province as a whole. Dialysis and kidney disease are a growing issue in our health care system as they are across the country. We'll continue to use mobile services to extend the dialysis capacity that we do have. I am very cognizant of the travelling that some Albertans are doing. We will be moving, as will most of the other parts of the country, to home dialysis in the future for patients for whom it is appropriate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. The time for question period has been consumed.

We have one point of clarification at 2:36 from Airdrie, which will be dealt with in the usual spot just before Orders of the Day.

In the meantime we'll move on with hon. members making their members' statements. In 30 seconds the Clerk will call for it, and we'll start with Calgary-Glenmore.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Airdrie.

Pipeline Development

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to update you and the House on the important work that continues to open new markets for our province's resources. What I'm referring to is the ongoing work on new and existing pipelines. Shipping oil by pipeline is currently the safest method of transporting large volumes over large distances, and shipping it through an existing pipeline helps to minimize the environmental impact.

Last week TransCanada began the process for a west-east crude oil pipeline known as Energy East. The company filed a project description with the National Energy Board and is expected to proceed with a regulatory application in a few months. Energy East is a \$12 billion project that provides thousands of jobs across Canada. It will have the capacity to move 1.1 million barrels of oil per day to Quebec and New Brunswick.

Also, the National Energy Board has approved line 9B. Reversing line 9B has widespread benefits. It gives producers an opportunity to get Alberta oil to new markets and for eastern refineries to reduce or eliminate their dependency on higher priced foreign oil.

Our government also made our national interest determination submission to the U.S. State Department for the Keystone XL

project. The submission outlined Alberta's strong regulatory framework and proven track record in developing some of the world's most progressive environmental initiatives.

We are delivering on our government's promise to continue to advocate for important projects which support our long-term prosperity. We have been clear that opening new markets is job one for our government as it will ensure fairer prices for the resources every Albertan owns, allowing us to invest in building a stronger, more secure Alberta. As part of the building Alberta plan we continue to build new markets for our products and services so we can keep investing in what matters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Provincial Borrowing

Mr. Anderson: Budget 2014 adds over \$5 billion in debt this year and brings Alberta's total debt to over \$21 billion by 2016. The Finance minister compares debt financing for infrastructure to a home mortgage. This is a poor comparison. A home mortgage is secured by an appreciating asset worth more than the amount of the loan, and it's easy to sell. In contrast, government assets depreciate, are worth less than what they cost to build, and they are difficult to sell even if you would ever want to.

The minister also says that because interest rates are currently low, now is the time to borrow. Interest rates are indeed low, for now, but these debts will need to be regularly refinanced, and as our debt load increases, so will the available interest rate and with it billions in new annual interest charges. Have we forgotten the consequences of sustained debt financing in Europe, the U.S., and Ontario? Interest rates won't always be low, Alberta won't always enjoy record revenues, and when those realities manifest themselves, we and our children will pay a heavy price.

The minister states that folks moving to Alberta aren't bringing their roads and schools with them; thus, we must borrow to build. First off, new Albertans don't bring roads with them – that is true – but they do bring their taxes. Population growth is not a drain on our finances. It pads our bottom line. Secondly, if we must borrow for projects now to cope with high growth, what's going to change in the future so we don't have to borrow? Forecasts predict high population growth for decades. Those folks will all need schools and roads, too. If we can't build what we need today without going into debt even with record revenues, when will we ever be able to do so, and when our economy and growth rates slow, how are we going to pay the interest charges on the debt incurred during the high-growth years?

Colleagues, it's never too late to do the right thing. Let us leave our children with a legacy free from the burden of debt. We owe them nothing less.

Dr. David Schindler

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to a fellow biologist, Dr. David Schindler. Dr. Schindler recently retired as professor at the University of Alberta after 24 years of service. He's become known as a pre-eminent leader in his field of limnology, the study of freshwater ecosystems. Dr. Schindler began his career at Trent University, where I also taught, and from 1968 to 1989 he served with the federal fisheries department, where he was founding director of the experimental lakes area in Ontario. Dr. Schindler joined the faculty at the University of Alberta as the Killam Memorial chair and professor of ecology in 1989.

Among Dr. Schindler's many career accomplishments was his early work on eutrophication of freshwater lakes induced by the introduction of phosphates, principally from household detergents; on acidification of freshwater lakes by air pollutants; and on long-term effects of climate change on freshwater ecosystems. Later together with his scientific colleagues he made contributions to knowledge about the effects of the oil sands industry on contamination of the Athabasca River watershed.

Among his many honours and awards Dr. Schindler is an officer of the Order of Canada and the Alberta Order of Excellence. He was the recipient of a Rhodes scholarship, the Gerhard Herzberg gold medal, the first Stockholm water prize, the Volvo environmental prize, and the Tyler prize for environmental achievement. He's also the recipient of no less than 11 honorary degrees from North American universities and numerous other academic awards.

In an era when our federal government's muzzling of scientists has compromised their role and politics often trumps scientific fact, Dr. Schindler is an embodiment of what it means to be a scientist: to discover, to seek the truth, to rely on facts, and to disseminate knowledge to the public for the benefit of society.

Slave Lake Family Care Clinic

Ms Calahasen: Thank you to all the constituents who have contacted me in many ways to express their concerns regarding health care services in the Slave Lake region. Health care is a priority for all Albertans, and the residents of Slave Lake are no exception. The fires in Slave Lake seriously damaged the health care infrastructure and left our region with limited services. So when family care clinics were presented as a new health care model, I investigated this approach and was convinced this was the way to provide the best services holistically.

Let's look at the facts. After the fire many medical professionals were forced to leave the community. Today the Slave Lake region, serving 12,000 residents, has four full-time doctors, two locum doctors, and services are supplied seven days per week with extended hours. In fact, four new doctors are being recruited, some of whom will have specialties in obstetrics, which is a high-priority need. In addition, the FCC has seven nurse practitioners, two LPNs, two chronic disease nurses, a dietitian, a social worker, a pharmacist, two physiotherapists, a mental health and wellness co-ordinator, and an aboriginal liaison worker, people who work hard for Slave Lake.

2:50

Since the FCC opened in April 2012, there have been over 22 per cent fewer emergency department visits to the hospital because the FCC met the immediate medical needs. Fifty per cent of the patients who came in with one concern were screened for additional common health risks. Over 80 per cent of FCC patients who were surveyed said that they were happy with the care they received.

Although two physician couples chose to leave one of Slave Lake's clinics, we should not lose sight of the tremendous gains in health care services to Slave Lake residents since the fire. But, yes, there is still room for improvement. Therefore, I convened a meeting between the Tri-Council and Alberta Health Services a few weeks ago to keep all parties informed and to put a plan in place to address any shortages and to get answers to the many questions. This meeting was very successful and helped alleviate many of the concerns. As of today 10 Q and As have been posted on the AHS website, and more will be posted.

I believe that the FCC is a proven holistic model of health care. From the evidence I have seen and more to come, the residents of Slave Lake can be assured that they will continue to receive a very high level of medical services in our community.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Paralympic Winter Games

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As our province continues to celebrate the accomplishments of our athletes at the Sochi Olympics, there is another international competition in Sochi where our best athletes are representing our province and our country. I'm speaking of the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games.

Among the competitors is a Leduc native, Ms Michelle Salt, who is there to compete in parasnowboard. Michelle is one of 49 athletes representing our country in Sochi. Michelle lost 75 per cent of her right leg above the knee after a near-fatal motorcycle accident in June of 2011. But instead of allowing herself to be limited by her disability, she defied it and set herself a new goal of becoming an elite athlete.

She didn't even wait to get out of the hospital to begin. Three weeks after her accident Canadian sledge hockey player Greg Westlake visited her to advise on how to get started in Paralympic competition. Since that day Michelle has trained hard at not only recovering from the horrific injuries but at becoming an elite athlete, all the while continuing with her own real estate business as well as becoming a motivational speaker, sharing her story and her life lessons. Her struggles, her strength, and her success serve as an inspiration to us all.

I would ask that we all learn more about the para-athletes in our constituencies and support and celebrate those who are currently representing our province and country in Sochi, including the gold medal won today by Brian McKeever, a para-Nordic skier represented by the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tax Policy

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, people say lots of things about the character of Albertans, and one that comes up often is that we value fairness. We don't like to hear that someone is getting a special deal when others are restricted from accessing that same deal. Albertans like to compete on a level playing field, and I think that's why the flat tax is really irritating folks these days. The idea that one group, the wealthy, are getting a better tax deal than everyone else rubs against the grain.

There is another situation where taxation is unfair in Alberta, and that's the nonresidential industrial property tax. This is a tax that is collected on transmission lines, pipelines, telecommunication lines, railways, cogeneration stations, and machinery and equipment. When you think about it, most of these are located in large empty spaces, but they are paid for and needed by all Albertans.

So where is the unfairness? Well, the money is mostly collected by MDs and counties, and it stays there. These sparsely populated areas are collecting \$1.4 billion for 17 per cent of the people while the other 83 per cent, living in urban areas, get to share in only \$81.5 million. Put another way, counties and MDs get 98 per cent of this tax while cities, towns, and villages get 2 per cent. It's just not fair in today's Alberta, when two-thirds of the citizens live in towns, villages, and cities.

Now, we can fix this. Today I am bringing forward Motion 501 to urge the government to distribute the revenue from the combined low expenditure assessments, the same industrial property tax, on a per capita basis across the province. I've been working on getting a better deal for urban areas for some time. In 2009 I brought forward Bill 204, which was the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, to redistribute income tax. The government shot it down. But I'm persistent, and I'm trying again with Motion 501. Please join me in prodding the government to be fair.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, as the new chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report dated March 2014 and entitled Review of the Monetization of Natural Gas in the Province of Alberta. Copies of this report are being distributed to members today.

This review was undertaken on the committee's own initiative in accordance with Standing Order 52.07(2). I was fortunate enough to be a member of the committee during the review process, and I'm pleased to inform you, Mr. Speaker, that it was a very valuable learning experience for all those involved.

I would like to thank the members of the committee, from all sides of the House, for their co-operation and great ideas throughout the process. I would also like to thank the LAO staff for their dedication in helping the committee with this review. Finally, I would like to thank all of the stakeholders who met with us in person, over the phone, and via video conference for sharing their opinions and expertise on the subject.

The committee looks forward to receiving the government's response to the recommendations set out in this report within the 150-day period set out in Standing Order 52.09(1).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act I'm pleased to table the 2013-14 third-quarter update on the Alberta heritage savings

trust fund. Copies were distributed to members' offices on February 26.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from constituent Jill Sheward, and she is writing with her concerns about hearing that the government of Alberta is considering changes to the operation of the land titles system. She believes strongly that this is an essential public service and that the government is best placed to ensure protection for industry and consumers.

The second tabling that I have is an e-mail from a constituent who is very concerned at the amount that rents are going up. Her rental increases: the first year it was \$20, the second year it was another \$20, and the rental increase this year is \$90. So she is asking as a low-income person for a rental cap. She believes that it's outrageous and unjustified to have that kind of increase.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Cardston-Taber-Warner, just before you go ahead, Government House Leader, you caught my eye there because it's coming up to 3 o'clock.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that we go beyond 3 o'clock for the tablings.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let's go to Cardston-Taber-Warner for tablings.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a summary by my assistant in Taber of a conversation that she had with Mrs. Mary Sinclair of Milk River expressing her unhappiness — very unhappy — about the Premier's decision not to pay back the \$45,000 about the trip.

3:00

Secondly, an e-mail from Roger Davies, a pharmacist from Magrath, Alberta, expressing his concern about the continuing problems that small-town pharmacies are having.

Thirdly and finally, another e-mail, from Mr. Lloyd Morgan, the owner of Newcastle Towing in Drumheller, expressing his concern about the safety of tow truck operators while they're out performing their important duties, making a request that they be allowed to run a different colour of lights to enhance the awareness of the public.

I have those three with the requisite copies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish to table documents in relation to my question to the minister today regarding expense submissions in regard to Travel Alberta. I have the requisite copies thereof.

The Speaker: Hon. members, with the exception of points of order, that concludes our Routine.

Point of Clarification

The Speaker: Now, the Member for Airdrie did rise on a point of clarification, which is in effect a point of order according to our standing orders. He wanted some clarification on a ruling that I

had made, and I'm prepared to give that now as I said I would. I'll try to do this in a matter of a few minutes if you'll allow me.

I want to draw your attention to a few specific points. First of all, in our Standing Orders, item 13, order and decorum, it states the following: "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and decide questions of order." Harness that thought, "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum." What do I do to try to preserve order and decorum? Well, typically, when something gets out of hand, it flares up, I rise, and I say, "Hon. members, cool your jets," or words to that effect, or I just stand up and stay silent, hoping to get your attention so that you will then get silent so that we will then have the House restored. Typically, I might do that twice in a row. Today I did it three times in a row. Last week I did it many times in a row. Last week I also said that somebody will pay a penalty if you disregard the Speaker's requests, and I will penalize an entire caucus if necessary.

Today I had to put that rule, that particular admonishment, into effect. It gave me no joy to not let Cypress-Medicine Hat finish off his question. I'm sure he had a very good final supplemental that he didn't get to ask, but there was justification for it, in my mind. I'll bet you that I would get a number of other members to agree that there was quite a loud outburst from the Wildrose at a certain point, and I'll bet that I'll get the Wildrose to agree that there was an equal outburst on the government side as well. So I had to penalize one of their members to be fair, but it was justified.

I give time outs, I give warnings, and I give admonishments. A week ago I stood in this House, and I indicated that I would be doing everything I could to help preserve that order and decorum.

Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, I took no pleasure in taking away your question either today. I have just explained why, and you can read about it in *Hansard*.

I wrote you procedural letters. I wrote to you all on January 23 about Assembly procedure. I'm assuming you read it. It's a long letter, but it covers a lot of what we're trying to do in this House. I wrote to you again just before we went into session on February 11. On page 2 I gave you an explanation of decorum in the House. You all got copies of this. It says here: I'm writing to you saying decorum is referred to in chapter 13 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009, and in *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, 1989, paragraph 35. And it goes on. I said: I am asking all members to review these rules before March 3 and to abide by them. I not only uttered these requests from the chair verbally, but I also put them in writing so that it would be abundantly clear exactly for a moment like this, which I was hoping we could avoid, but we couldn't.

I go on to say: the Speaker's role should not be viewed as a substitute for the individual responsibility that members must have for their own conduct. In my view, the Speaker's responsibility to the Assembly includes ensuring fairness by being consistent in interpretation and management, which leads to predictability. Members are always responsible for their own actions, and their conduct reflects primarily on them. Unfortunately, however, an individual's conduct is not viewed as a reflection of that member but also of his or her entire caucus and of the Assembly as a whole. Hopefully, all members are now very aware of this reality. The citizens of our province expect and deserve the highest standard of conduct and decorum from each one of us. I'll table a copy of that for *Hansard* later.

So there you have it. I have indicated that Speakers don't have a lot of power of enforcement, really, when it comes down to it. We can stand up and interject. We can stand up and say nothing and hope that you'll all come to order. Then when we say that we're

going to do something if you step over the line, I for one feel honour bound to act on it, and today I did.

I'm asking you again. I fully get this game that goes on in here. Fully. There are only one or perhaps two roles in all of this Chamber that I have not had the pleasure of having yet, but I've done it and seen it from the opposition's side. I know exactly how it works. I've seen it from the government's side, I've seen it from the House leader's side, and I've seen it from the whip's side, so I get what's going on here. I am prepared to let quite a bit of it go because it does get a little bit dull on occasion in here without all of that. I fully respect that you like to liven things up and spice it up. I indicated in my comments that I don't mind some thumping and heckling or whatever you want to call it that goes on during a member rising to question or speak, similarly to somebody offering an answer. It gives a little bit of added wind to the sail. I understand that.

But when it goes on and on and on throughout all 35 seconds of a question, through all 35 seconds of an answer and you can't hear a darn thing, you know what starts to happen? I start to get notes like this, and they don't just come from any one caucus. A lot of you don't know this, but – these are confidential; I don't show them to anybody, and I keep them – I hear people saying: when are you going to clamp down on people who are shouting out loud, questioning where a certain member might be? You know that the rules say we don't refer to a person's absence. They could be dealing with a family emergency, they could be dealing with a visit to the washroom, for all we know, or they could be on a trip or something else. But we don't try purposely to embarrass them by shouting out, "Where is so-and-so? Where is so-and-so?" yet this was heard. Unfortunately, it doesn't get recorded in *Hansard*, so all I have are notes to prove that by.

Then I get other members on both sides questioning and shouting out loud, "What a waste of time. What a waste of time," but *Hansard* doesn't pick it up. There are many other comments like that. Then I get members saying: well, why don't we just let the House decide how much heckling they want to permit? Right? I expect that's what Edmonton-Centre might want to speak on. I'm going to hear you in just a moment, Edmonton-Centre, because I respect where you're going to be coming from, I'm sure.

The point is that it's my job, or whoever is here in the Speaker's chair, to use some judgment. I do that. That's why I don't jump to my feet right away at the first outburst or the first major heckling or whatever. I typically let it settle down a little bit. You know me, and you know I've done that. But I also want you to get to know that when I say that I'm going to do something, you can count on me doing it. I have said it, and I will do it. We don't have much else we can do.

The final thing I'll say is this. If I don't impose some polite sanctions such as I imposed today, the only other recourse I have is to name you. Today I could have named about 30 of you. That would mean you'd be asked to leave the House. Well, that's hardly how this was designed to work, right? So I just ask you to show some respect and dignity for the institution, show some for your colleagues from your own caucus, from other caucuses. Let's get on with opposition holding the government to account and government giving the best answers they possibly can. If you don't know the answer, take it under advisement and come back with a good answer. That will help. A lot of little things like that will help.

Let me go to Edmonton-Centre. I know she has something to contribute here. I think Airdrie would like to speak, or someone on his behalf. Let's go to Edmonton-Centre first.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a question asking for clarification under Standing Order 13(2). I noticed that the Speaker indicated that he felt that in order to preserve that order and decorum under Standing Order 13(1), it was justified to levy punishment on compliant members. He recognized that the two members from which he prohibited a final supplementary question had not in fact breached any of the rules in the House. I am wondering where I could find a reference that indicated that breaches from the Speaker would be imposed upon people who in fact had not broken the rules.

3:10

As a footnote, I will admit that the Speaker is correct. I have suggested that we have a vote in the Assembly as to how much we believe that the heckling is out of place, and we can all vote on it rather than putting the Speaker in a position of having to make a decision. It is pretty well known that I disagree with the Speaker on his use of removing questions given that they are such an integral part of what the opposition does and such an integral part of holding the government to account. I think it's inappropriate to do that.

But I would like an answer to the levying of punishment on those who are innocent.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. member, everything that's printed in this book is like a rule or an order of some point. That's why it's called Standing Orders. That's why I started with that very question, and it's called 13(1). I'll dig up other examples if you like. I'll write them, and I'll send them out to you so as to not take up too much time here.

I cited in my procedural letter some spots in *Beauchesne's* that you should look at and also in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. But our very own standing orders say very clearly under 13(1) that "the Speaker shall preserve order and decorum," and it goes on to say, "... and decide questions of order." And I decided today. I decided twice today. I've already said that it gave me no joy to take away those two questions, but I wanted to make the point as seriously as I could without hurting anybody. I hope I didn't hurt either of those two members. They'll have a chance tomorrow as well. But anything that's in this book should be abided by. It's all for your own good, your own guidance, your own abidance if you will.

I will clarify further, if necessary, but I'd like to move on. We have other business to do. I know Wildrose wanted to have a quick comment on this, and then let me go to the fourth party, and we'll have that. Make them brief, if you would, please. I'll try to be brief as well.

Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the indulgence on behalf of my colleague from Airdrie under 13(2). In your comments, which were heard, you comment on how there is a certain amount of ebb and flow that you're willing to allow in the House, yet there is seemingly a bit of a blurred line as to when admonishment turns into punishment. I'm wondering if you could perhaps try to clarify for us where that line is. Hopefully, we can attempt to abide by it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Yeah. I don't know that there is a real easy way to answer your question, but take this as a hint. If you see me rise once, you know that I'm not rising to exercise. If you see me rise a second time a few minutes later, again, you know I'm not rising just to be noticed. If I then rise a third time, it's probably game over for some reason, and I have to do something at that point.

Take that as one perhaps hint. If you see me rising, or if you see me doing this while I'm seated, waving my hand up and down to silence it, like I did on the Wildrose and the Liberals and the NDs today and like I did on the government side over here as well – I motioned them down a few times to keep it quiet, keep it orderly. You all saw me do it.

I try to be fair, you know. I know it's not just all opposition that does the heckling. I understand that, and I don't like some of the heckling that goes on on the government side, either. So I try to do that. Take that as sort of a hint, if you will, deputy opposition House leader, because that's usually how it works. I'm not often going to jump up and cut somebody off and issue a sanction right off the get-go. I realize it's Monday. You haven't seen each other for four days. You missed each other. You love each other. I get all that. You want to show that expression. That would be one way to watch for it next time, okay?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have three questions that I'd ask you to consider for clarification in the course of preparing your written note to us. First, you referenced the authority under the standing orders of the Speaker to decide questions of order, and I am inquiring as to whether or not you are interpreting that to mean the order of the questions as opposed to questions of how you maintain order. I would suggest that the former interpretation is an incorrect interpretation of what the standing orders say. They aren't referring to the issue of questions in question period. But I'd ask that you clarify when you write your thing.

The Speaker: Very good question.

I'm sorry; you have a second one?

Ms Notley: I did. I have three.

The Speaker: Yeah. Go ahead.

Ms Notley: The second one was simply, again, to clarify that I'm seeking clarification further to the question asked by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, which is: where is the authority to penalize one member for the actions of another?

The third question is simply whether you can turn your mind to the issues of whether taking away a question in question period from an opposition member has the same impact to our legislative and parliamentary system as taking a question from the government and its right to so-called question itself, given the disparate opportunities for questioning government that exist between government members and opposition members and given the fact that question period is, in fact, the opposition's sole opportunity or often one of the very few opportunities to question government and that it's not the same for government members as a result, when you consider the fair disposition of penalties, whether or not you have considered what I would characterize as an unfair effect of equal imposition of that particular penalty on members of this Assembly as it relates to the members of the opposition.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Very good questions. I'm not going to get into a long debate on this because I see that Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill wants to speak as well, and I'll allow him in just a minute but very briefly.

This is not the only opportunity to hold government to account, as you know. But it's not just opposition that holds government to account; it's also government members who try to hold government to account, too, because they are not government.

Yes, they are on the government side, but only sworn cabinet members are the government. Everyone else in here is absolutely in the same boat when it comes to questions, okay? It may not look like that to you, hon. member, but that's how it's designed to be.

Your first question about order and order: I would ask that you as a House leader for your caucus and the others to get together and actually clarify some of these standing orders for yourself so that it would be a lot clearer for me. I'm interpreting it one way, and you might be interpreting it a different way. It's just the same as supplementals. Should we allow preambles or not? Should we allow supplementary questions to have a preamble? Yes or no? I made a ruling that I will allow it for the first five questions only, the first five main questions, and then after that I won't have it. Why? Because the agreement amongst the House leaders is that supplementary questions should not have preambles. Should not. Now, I don't know how far back that goes, but I've referenced it many, many, many times, yet the House leaders haven't seen to get together and ask how to clarify that. It would be a great help if we could do that.

I forgot your third question. What was it, briefly? Do you remember what it was?

Ms Notley: It was the authority to penalize one member for the actions of another.

The Speaker: Oh, right. Thank you for that.

Well, in the absence of any other sanction that I can impose as a Speaker – and I can tell you this with great authority, having conversed many times with Speakers across Canada over the past two years – we sometimes make a rule and enforce a rule on the spot when no precedent perhaps exists. Now, I don't know if that precedent that I just set today exists anywhere. Perhaps it doesn't. But I gave you warning last week of what I would do, and that's what I had to do today. I'm sorry to have done it.

Let's go to Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. We'll give you a quick minute to comment, and then we'll move on.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have any issue with losing my supplemental. That's not what I'm rising for. You have argued long and hard and admonished the Assembly on many occasions with respect to these disturbances and interruptions and heckling, which take away from the discourse here. You mentioned earlier that there is nothing, in your view, short of naming these individuals that you can do other than warning them, but I would say that there is nothing in the standing orders, there is nothing in parliamentary conduct that requires you to stick with the speaking order that's given to you by the various parties.

I would say that the way to bring some discipline back into this House is to refuse to recognize individuals who have been egregious in their interruptions, whether it's on one side of the House or the other, refuse to recognize them for the next 24 hours or the next day in the House, and in that way maybe we can achieve some better discipline in the Chamber. I don't think that you need to be restricted to the sanction of naming somebody. You can just simply refer to those individuals who are next in the speaking order and refuse to recognize them.

3:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Very briefly, in 30 seconds: let me just tell you that I gave that warning last year, and I'm just waiting for the opportunity to remind people here again, and that's what I will be doing. I will have to do something if this House continues to go into disorder. Now, if you want to take up

Edmonton-Centre's suggestion, as House leaders get your heads together and figure out how much heckling you think we should allow.

Maybe we should bring in some sort of a barometer, thermometer type of apparatus, a noise machine, that says when it hits this level here. Well, I'm being facetious, obviously. But you have to leave that to the good judgment of the chair, and I do my best to allow as much of it as I can, to keep it lively and spontaneous but also to maintain law, order, good discipline, and good conduct so that we can be role models that are admired in the community, not those who are boycotting having their students attend because of our ill behaviour. Okay?

Let us move on, then.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, I would rather that you name me than punish someone else in here because of what I've done. I'd offer that to you. You name me; don't punish somebody else.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'd be happy to do that on the next occasion.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014

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

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014. The purpose of Bill 201 is to amend the Agricultural Pests Act in order that a tolerance level for *Fusarium graminearum* of 0.5 per cent be accepted for Alberta seed and feed. This is an issue that is important to my constituency as well as many communities across Alberta. *Fusarium* is an air- and soil-borne toxin that is classified as a pest under the act. Specifically, *Fusarium* head blight is the fungal disease caused by the presence of the *Fusarium graminearum* toxin.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

It is environmentally specific in that it flourishes in high heat and humidity during the flowering stage of cereal grains. If the weather conditions are dry and hot during this stage, the fungus will not develop. Once the toxin had infected the crops in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, it began to spread to the southern regions of our province. Mitigation and best practices have been in place in hoping to lessen the spread across the prairies. What we do know about the current regulation is that section 10 details that it is the duty of the inspector, who is usually the county ag field man, "who finds on any premises evidence of an infestation of any crop" to "notify persons engaged in the growing, transporting or processing of any crop... affected by the infestation." Theoretically, the landowner or producer is supposed to destroy the crop even if there are trace amounts of this fungus. This is not happening, Madam Speaker, nor should it.

The next person in the system who may see signs of *Fusarium* is working at the local seed cleaning plant. Some plants strictly enforce the rules, and others are less rigid. In other words, at the present time in Alberta the rules are not being consistently

enforced. Those plants that do enforcement will reject seed that has trace amounts. If they find just one seed in 200, they will reject it. That producer has the ability to take his seed to another seed cleaning plant where the same level of enforcement is not in place.

Our current regulation is unrealistic and unenforceable. *Fusarium graminearum* is here in Alberta, as it is in most of the rest of North America and Europe. Madam Speaker, our current regulation is not helpful to the success of Alberta farmers, growers, and producers and puts our province at a noticeable disadvantage economically. This economic disadvantage is exacerbated by the fact that strong agricultural provinces like Saskatchewan and Manitoba treat the issue differently. Growers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are free to sell their seed with acceptable levels. What is acceptable? The Canadian Grain Commission allows a range of .2 per cent to .5 per cent for export, depending on the type of grain. Other countries allow in the range of .5 per cent, thus the reason for my bill. Best management practices indeed help to mitigate and deal with the presence of *Fusarium* but will never eliminate it completely. In order to help farmers, that would be in keeping with the zero-tolerance standard. Because of the very nature of *Fusarium*, expecting to have an absolutely pure and natural environment free of toxins is almost impossible.

For example, Albertans are being proactive in similar issues, with the porcine epidemic diarrhea virus. The people at Genome Alberta are heading up a collaborative Canadian effort to develop a vaccine for this deadly pig disease. It has recently been discovered in Ontario and Manitoba. Approximately 20 per cent of hogs in the United States are infected. It is devastating to the hog industry. Its effects on the hog industry are being described as similar to BSE in cattle. PED virus is not here in Alberta yet, but we are being proactive in leading the team to discover measures to mitigate its spread.

Madam Speaker, I wonder how we can expect a seed grown and developed in a natural environment to be completely free of bacteria, pests, or insects. This leads me to believe that there is almost nothing that is truly pure or free from something in the environment since it is an open ecological system and different factors are consistently interacting with one another in a series of symbiotic relationships.

To explain this line of reasoning a little further, Madam Speaker, I ask you and my fellow hon. members to think about wine. Now, wine has a familiar toxin in it. Arsenic is found in almost all types of white and red wine in trace amounts. Many of us enjoy a glass of wine from time to time, whether it be with dinner or surrounded by friends and colleagues. As my chemist son-in-law tells me, the poison is in the dose. In the case of wine and many other foods and beverages, there are regulated acceptable levels of toxins, but this presence of arsenic, a toxin, has not stopped many of us from drinking it altogether.

Madam Speaker, the level of toxin that causes *Fusarium* to occur is already regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. This means that in very small amounts *Fusarium* is tolerated. There have been many studies that deal with the ingestion of contaminated foods and feeds, yet we still do not allow our farmers, landowners, and processors to sell their crops that may have trace amounts of it.

We know that *Fusarium* will continue to spread. We know that other prairie provinces allow for the presence of *Fusarium* in their wheat and barley. We know that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency regulates levels of toxins present in cereal grains, corn, seed, and crops so that it is not harmful to humans or for livestock consumption. Simply not allowing for *Fusarium*-infected kernels

to be present in our agricultural products is not a sound or reliable management technique.

So I ask: what should our practices be? The Alberta Wheat Commission has expressed its concern for the zero-tolerance position, feeling that realistically it is unattainable. They have also begun investigative work to propose a reasonable tolerance level based on sound science.

I have a letter of support from Lethbridge county. I would like to quote part of this letter.

We strongly support the amendment as it would not deem fusarium head blight a pest or nuisance unless it is found at a concentration of greater than 0.5% in any plant, seed, crop, vegetation or other matter.

This amendment would aid seed producers in the province by creating a tolerance level on seed that could be legally sold. Seed producers would also be given the opportunity to propagate seed that contains small amounts of fusarium head blight in an effort to create resistant varieties.

I will be tabling five copies of this letter at the conclusion of my remarks.

Madam Speaker, the rural Alberta economic footprint is \$77.4 billion annually, and because of initiatives from this government in collaboration with our hard-working Alberta farmers and growers, we are well positioned for an even greater growth across many agricultural sectors. But our position as an agricultural leader could be compromised by dated practices like that of the zero-tolerance position. Given the current reality regarding grain transportation in our province, for which the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has advocated strongly on behalf of Albertans, we must give our producers every advantage possible.

3:30

Madam Speaker, I understand that Bill 201 may not garner full support from all of my colleagues in this House. If anything I am thankful that I have the opportunity to bring this important agricultural topic to the forefront of discussion with our constituents, friends, and family.

Alberta has a reputation as a world-class supplier of food, energy, and other agricultural commodities. With Bill 201 I only ask that we begin the discussion on this zero-tolerance practice to ensure that we maintain and enhance our reputation today and into the future.

With that, Madam Speaker, I conclude my comments. I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate on Bill 201. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, would you please table that letter from Lethbridge county tomorrow during the regular time for tablings? Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First off, I commend the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for bringing this issue up. It is key. With seed producers in my riding it's one of the big things and in Alberta generally. We're losing huge revenue by our zero tolerance, which is something that I don't feel is obtainable as a grain producer myself.

The member brought this up, and it touches – I mean, she hit everything quite clearly on it. A lot of seed plants don't have a testing process. Some do; some don't. I was a member of the Blackie district seed cleaning plant for over 15 years. About 10 or 12 years ago we brought in testing for Fusarium before you could clean it. Now, that's just one. Within 15 miles of that there's another seed cleaning plant where you do not have to test before

you clean. So therein lies the problem. You have producers with not exactly the same set of rules, and trying to go along with it – not that anybody is trying to shortcut anything. But unless the seed cleaning plants, for instance, are all playing by the same rules, producers that are cleaning their own seed, whether they plan to or not, are not checking for this, and then they also could be planting seed with Fusarium.

Now, this goes back economically to all the seed growers in the province, who obviously have a lot at stake here. We're the only province in Canada that has a zero tolerance on Fusarium for seed growers. Now, this puts us at an economic loss because other seed growers in Saskatchewan, Manitoba don't have that on there.

With that, I think we've got to look at the big picture, you know, in simple math. To buy No. 1 wheat for seed right now is running about 12 and a half dollars a bushel for certified seed. Now, the certified seed growers put a lot more time into producing their grain. As far as the cleaning process, when they're going to clean out augers, combines for seed, anybody that farms can understand the challenges of making sure that the varieties don't get crossed over. In saying that, they obviously have to charge a premium for what they do to have certified seed. When you buy certified seed, you get a little blue tag that tells you the amount of weeds that are in that, what the standards are. I think this could be something that could be worked into this motion, to be able to make sure that it's something that's followed through on the enactment part of it.

The biggest thing is to let producers know what they're buying. Now, if they know that they could be buying a seed that has up to .5 per cent Fusarium in it, that would give them the opportunity to decide whether they do or don't want to buy it. In this province it's a very divisive argument. Every MLA in here that is in an agricultural growing sector has probably heard from producers on both sides of the coin. Some are saying: "Okay. We don't have it. Don't allow it into our area." It's almost a north-south split.

Last fall it came up as a motion at the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. It was a very heated debate. People got up there and got talking about how we don't have it in northern Alberta. The argument could be taken that there is probably Fusarium in northern Alberta. There are some tests that show it. It's just that if you're not looking for something, you don't tend to generally test for it.

Not that they're bad producers, but heat and humidity is the key to how this disease gets transferred around. It's a fungal disease. It's in the soil, and it's also airborne. So what happens is that strong winds, which we do have in this province once in a while, can transfer it over from somebody that's doing best management practices on their farm. They're treating their seed. They're making sure their rotation isn't tight on anything that's close to that in a cereal program.

The problem with Fusarium is that we're also starting to get it in potatoes. In southern Alberta, where we have our large irrigation areas, these are things we need to look at. There's also Fusarium in canola. It goes back to heat and humidity. That's the whole element of how this product moves along this disease.

I guess one of the key things, to me anyway, is that we have the fight of the north-south. It's not healthy for the province to be split that way, but it does come down to that. I commend the member for pulling this up because it's pretty gutsy for anybody north of Red Deer to bring up this topic and fight for it as she is. So I commend her for that.

Now, one of the things there that she talked about is how the Alberta ag service boards are – in all honesty, this is something that could be done through the municipalities. Each municipality has the process of what they decide, they deem what to check for.

The ag field men and their society are the ones who go out and actually – if you get a weed management act or a pest act, they're the ones that enforce it.

So the way to do this to keep, I guess, all parties happy is to be able to have it where each municipality would decide how to enforce it or not enforce it, be kind of that happy medium. Right now I'll guarantee that anybody in this House that has had calls on it has had it 50-50. We've had people call adamantly against it, saying, "We need to stick to zero per cent or we'll end up like Manitoba and we'll lose millions every year on production because of the Fusarium in there," or we have people saying: "Let's be honest about this. Let's look at this as a proactive way to deal with it rather than reactive."

Now, when you get into Fusarium, it's a mycotoxin. I'll have to go to my speaking notes here because I'm past the – we're into the smart stuff which doesn't roll off my head quite as fast. The disease has been spread widely due to extensive planting of highly susceptible varieties. So into the varieties side again – you know, I compare it a little bit to a flu shot – in order to be able to get a vaccine back on something, you need to be able to know what you have and give the plant that so it knows how to fight it.

We get into GMO talks of how – I'm not even getting into that dance. But genetically modified grains, food, anything like that, you introduce a trait into the genes, and then you figure out how that goes against it. We use it, and everybody talks immediately about Roundup and canola and things like that.

Papaya has had it for years. Back in 1985, I think it was, papaya had a ring in it. It's a fruit, so they had this ring that was coming in and eating and causing the whole – going from like 56 million pounds a year of papaya down to 26 because they wouldn't introduce this whole vaccine stream into it. It's not that we're against genetically modifying anything; it's figuring out what we're going to do economically to make sure that we're a viable province.

To me, this is one of those things we need to really figure out. We're getting hurt huge because we're the only province in Canada that has a zero tolerance on it. The seed growers in Saskatchewan automatically have an economic gain on us because they don't have to worry about it. I'm not saying we throw the reins in the cart and we just let the horses run wild with it and we don't have any kind of a standard. We need to have some kind of a standard in there, and I think .5 is attainable.

When you test for Fusarium, there are different tests. There's the old plate test. Fusarium is on the outside of the seed, so making sure that the seed plant place, the laboratory that's doing it, has zero Fusarium in it to begin with. It's airborne, so if they're testing numerous amounts – I'll go the north versus south. Some of the laboratories, for instance, if they have grain samples coming in from the south, where they have higher tolerances of Fusarium in it and they have that in their lab – I'm not saying that they're doing a bad job. I'm just saying that the probability is there that a trace amount of Fusarium could be just lingering in their lab when they bring in a seed sample from a certified seed grower.

That certified seed grower can have a grain bin, a 5,000-bushel grain bin at, say, \$10 for easy math. Fifty thousand dollars worth of grain is in there. Just a trace amount of Fusarium on that test will roll out to the fact that they can't sell that as seed. Now, these are people's livelihoods. These are people that put a lot of time and money into what they're doing, and they make sure that they do the high-end job that they do.

Like everything we have in this province, I don't think we're second to none on anything that we do. I think we always show that we know what we're doing and we have the best product to sell and market out there. That's what makes our agricultural industry at the \$77 billion cash receipts that we have. It also rolls

out the fact that it's the largest renewable resource that we have in this province. I think we're all stewards of the land, anybody that is in agriculture or is tied to the agricultural sector, because, let's be honest, it's not just the farmer or the rancher that's tied to agriculture.

When we look back to the \$50,000 bin of wheat versus if it has a trace amount – it doesn't even have to be the .5; it can be down to just a trace amount, and as long as it has that, it can't be sold as seed. So we have the seed growers in this province now that put their livelihood on the line every year, and they're sitting there, and they've just gone from a \$50,000 value on a 5,000-bushel bin rolling it down to, you know, \$3 or \$4 a bushel for it, and then it goes to \$20,000. Well, you sit there, and that's a \$30,000 economic hit just on one bin of grain because it has a trace in it.

3:40

So I think we really need to sit down and look at this, and that's why I'm supporting this member on this. I think we really need to pull our head out of the sand on this and figure out that zero isn't obtainable and it's not something that we have right now. If it means that municipalities are going to be able to sit there and decide amongst themselves to do this, which is their choice – and it goes back to local decision-making. We make the legislation so it's available. We don't say that all the municipalities have to follow that. It's up to them to do their own decision-making on it. Then that would be able to allow everybody from the north to the south to decide whether they want to have a zero per cent or a .5 per cent or a .25 per cent. They could figure that out with their own ag servicemen, the ag field men, what they're going to do on it. So I think there are means and ways around this so that it could work for everybody.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and speak to Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, that is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. The purpose of Bill 201 is to amend the Agricultural Pests Act in order that a tolerance level for Fusarium graminearum of .5 per cent be accepted for Alberta seed and feed.

Given the airborne nature of Fusarium and its ability to spread rapidly from field to field, management practices have been developed in order to help mitigate its spread. After extensive public consultation in 2002 Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development released the first comprehensive Alberta Fusarium graminearum management plan. The purpose of the plan is to limit the introduction, escalation, spread, and economic impact of Fusarium. This management plan requires that all cereal grain intended for seed be tested and certified free of Fusarium. Land-owners and seed, grain, and feed producers have the responsibility to control, destroy, or prevent the establishment of Fusarium as outlined in the act and respective regulations. Additionally, it is their responsibility to practise and adhere to all management practices to meet the objectives of the management plan.

The plan works to complement the legislative authority by the act to enforce control for declared pests in Alberta. Fusarium has been a declared pest since 1999, and the enforcement of control is delegated to the local municipalities and carried out by agricultural field men. The purpose of the Alberta Fusarium management plan is awareness, not enforcement. Instead, the agricultural field men work with producers to ensure they have the

information to protect themselves and their neighbours from the effects of Fusarium. Despite efforts in the motion by the management plan, it appears as though Fusarium has continued to spread throughout Alberta, making its way north, where it had not previously been found.

Madam Speaker, according to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development projected total losses due to Fusarium-infected seed could possibly be as high as \$64 million. This projected loss figure could especially impact central and east-central Alberta as well as the irrigated districts of southern Alberta.

Madam Speaker, best practices for dealing with Fusarium have two objectives. The first objective is for cereal corn producers to limit the introduction, escalation, spread, and economic impact of Fusarium in Alberta. Here the plan suggests that growers should always use healthy seed with no detectable levels of Fusarium to avoid introducing the pathogen into their production area. The plan also recommends that growers request a seed health report that shows testing results specifically for Fusarium.

The second objective is for cereal and corn producers to limit the introduction, escalation, spread, and economic impact of Fusarium in Alberta intended for use as feed, bedding, or industrial use. If Fusarium-infested grain will be used as livestock feed, the management plan recommends that grain samples be checked for mycotoxin levels through a lab analysis. Knowledge of the mycotoxin levels will produce guidance as to whether the grain is suitable for feed, especially for more sensitive animals such as swine.

Feed grain, grain products, and straw suspected of being infested with Fusarium can be fed to finishing cattle, which will aid in the elimination of the pathogen, or they can be composted where compost temperatures reach 60 to 70 degrees Celsius for at least two weeks. If feed grain or grain products are spilled at any time during the feeding and handling process, producers are encouraged to consider recovering and composting.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, a sound management plan and following best practices play an important role in mitigating the spread of Fusarium. This management plan strives to work hand in hand with the zero tolerance for Fusarium accepted across Alberta. However, despite best efforts in employing management practices, Fusarium continues to spread across Alberta, even reaching northern areas, where until recently Fusarium was not present.

Madam Speaker, there are strong views on both sides of the Fusarium debate. Farmers here in Alberta are using best management practice to eliminate the escalation of Fusarium, yet these methods of practice are not working to eliminate the presence of Fusarium, and some argue that Fusarium might not ever be eradicated from Alberta's fields. Bill 201 would amend the Agricultural Pests Act to include a .5 per cent tolerance level for Fusarium, recognizing that Fusarium is here today and that we should employ measures that keep our agricultural products safe and allow farmers to sell their seeds and feed at the same time.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has a reputation as a world-class supplier of food and other agricultural commodities. Bill 201 will help ensure that farmers are able to compete with other agricultural jurisdictions who do not have a zero-tolerance restriction and maintain our position as a world-class agricultural supplier. I commend the hon. member for bringing this issue to the forefront of private members' business in the Legislature today, and I would encourage all members to support this bill and allow our farmers to compete on an equal footing with other western Canada producers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I speak of something that I am more familiar with, because it's from my heart and from my roots in Drumheller and Stettler, where I'm farming and where I've lived my whole life. Actually, to the evidence of some people in this room, I do know something of Fusarium because I experienced it first-hand on our farm way back in 1986. We were experiencing high rainfall in the area, which is unusual for the diverse area and the special areas. We had a crop of durum wheat that was coming to full flower and full development, but there were no seeds forming in the head. I was fortunate enough at that time to have a crop consultant who was born and raised in Ireland and some parts of England, where he had taken his training. He actually had experienced this calamity, I guess you could call it, in the crop, so he came and inspected the crop.

No one else in the constituency, no one else in the area, actually, even knew what was going on there, and it was a complete irregularity because of the moisture conditions, because of the cropping conditions. We were trying to be the best stewards of our land, the best stewards of our farm, and the best stewards of agriculture in that community, but we were still stricken with a calamity. The gentleman told us that there was, simply, absolutely nothing we could do. It's kind of a disheartening feeling to have that happen, to have someone come out who appeared and showed us his great qualifications and said that there was something the matter with our crop and that there was actually nothing we could do. There wasn't anything modern that we could spray on it. There wasn't a seed treatment that we could have put on it at the time. We simply had to harvest the crop and take it off for feed and dispose of it in a safe manner through our cattle, albeit at a low level. He explained to us the potential contamination or the feed levels that we could not use with our cattle and which would create a situation where the pregnant cattle would abort their calves.

This has been an interesting point with me because I believe that in this case potentially we should try and achieve zero tolerance. In the real world zero tolerance in this case simply isn't achievable, simply isn't attainable. I would like to stand by the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock on her point of bringing this forward in a regulated, correct fashion and that we should be aware and publicly aware, in a legislative fashion, that this calamity needs to be addressed. It's important to the stewardship of agriculture in Alberta. It's important as a member of a province in the dominion, with neighbouring Saskatchewan, neighbouring Manitoba, and neighbouring British Columbia, that we bring this forward in a proper method so we can go forward in a commercial fashion.

3:50

I also remember some many years ago when this Fusarium outbreak occurred in Manitoba. Some may remember a certain Canadian organization – the initials I'll just call CWB – that was trying to market grain, and they did not have a proper designation for Fusarium-infected grain. It was unfortunate that this government entity was so clumsy as to not be able to handle this Fusarium-infected grain, and therefore the farmers in southern Manitoba, who had direct access across the American border and could have received cash value for their grain, were not allowed because of this regulation by this clumsy, awkward, archaic – could I call it old-fashioned? I don't know how many other prominent negative adjectives I could have given to it – organiza-

tion that has simply now become voluntary thanks to a certain federal Conservative government. I'm pleased to have had that happen.

Again, I'd like to reiterate to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock that I think she's on the right track here. It may prove out down the road that this level of infection will be a wedge level, but it needs to be done in such a fashion, to the Member for Little Bow, that the grain is not simply rejected, that this seed lot would not simply be rejected because of any trace finding of the disease in the seed.

I'd like to explain, too, on sort of a more understandable level that .5 per cent relates to 1 seed in 200, and 200 is about the equivalent of two handfuls of seed or one litre of seed. One seed is a very small amount in that. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock is facing this problem head-on, so we're going forward in that fashion.

It's also bringing forward a position that's of great difficulty for the provincial seed cleaning co-ops going forward. It's been a cause of great concern amongst those organizations. The Member for Little Bow has brought forward an example that some co-op facilities in one region will accept it and that others down the road would not. In this modern day of super Bs and five-axle transportation units it's just not acceptable to have a bi- or a multistandard. We need to have a single standard going forward there.

Again, seed quality and seed determination and good stewardship in agriculture going forward should be the goal of this province, and I believe that is the goal of this side of the House. Sometimes we have questions with regard to directions from the other side of the House, but I think today is the day that I can stand with the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and be in agreement.

With that, I'd relinquish the floor to other speakers. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, being brought forward by the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. It's not often that we're afforded the opportunity to speak on behalf of the agricultural community in regard to bill procedure, so I'm very pleased to do so today.

I stand here to discuss measures and regulations that are in place in various other jurisdictions, both in Canada and the United States, regarding the contaminant *Fusarium graminearum* among crop farmers, producers, and growers. Various jurisdictions have prudently engaged in *Fusarium* management procedures in an attempt to reduce the spread of this airborne disease that negatively impacts agricultural seed crops across the nation. Studies have shown that because of the prevalence of the *Fusarium* head blight and the ease with which it spreads, zero-tolerance measures are neither realistic nor desired by some of the various stakeholders whom this disease affects. As such, there are no other jurisdictions in Canada or the United States that practice a zero-tolerance *Fusarium* management system as seen here in our province.

Saskatchewan guidelines for *Fusarium*-infected seed indicate that farmers are not permitted to bring seed into regions where *Fusarium* is not common unless the seed lot has been tested and is free of disease. Seed infected with less than 5 per cent *Fusarium* can be planted back into regions where the *Fusarium* species has already been established as there will be disease inoculum present in the region; for example, infected cereal residue in

neighbouring fields. Agricultural guidelines available to farmers in Saskatchewan also indicate that seed infected with more than 5 per cent *Fusarium* may have other quality problems and is therefore a risk for farmers choosing to plant it.

Madam Speaker, use of a seed treatment is advised if *Fusarium* is present at levels greater than 2 to 3 per cent. This then becomes a situation where farmers' discretion is required to determine the risk they are willing to take in planting crops with *Fusarium* present. This situation also establishes a buyer-beware practice and suggests Saskatchewan farmers should always check lab reports for the condition of seeds before purchasing.

Saskatchewan agricultural guidelines also state that seed with up to 5 per cent total *Fusarium* species infection should be safe to plant. However, a level of 5 per cent total *Fusarium* infection could still result in significant seed blight if the seed treatment is not used. Madam Speaker, seed blight in this case refers to the term "*Fusarium* head blight," the disease name for the infection which we speak of today.

Further, Saskatchewan guidelines for seed testing are extensive, and it is recommended to have seed tested at an accredited laboratory to assess the level of seed-borne pathogens. At this time *Fusarium* testing is only an advisory test as it is not recognized as an accredited test by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. However, Saskatchewan labs make an effort to follow standardized procedures for isolating and identifying *Fusarium* species as there are various different ones that exist.

Experts in Saskatchewan suggest farmers buy only certified seed that has documented good quality. It's also mentioned that certified seed, according to the federal Seeds Act, must meet standards for germination, purity, and true loose smut but not for *Fusarium* infection. Therefore, again, the motto is buyer beware when anyone is purchasing seed. Farmers should ask to see the lab certificate before purchasing seed. That's just good practice.

Another important management practice is extensive research. Research as to the effectiveness of seed treatments to control seed-borne *Fusarium* in provincial fields is ongoing. In Saskatchewan research conducted in this province has found that seed treated with fungicides still develops lesions on the crowns or roots as a result of seed-borne *Fusarium* infections. Some researchers in this province recommend the use of a seed treatment as good insurance. Therefore, seed treatments may not eradicate seed-borne *Fusarium* completely but are still important management practices to protect against seed blight and minimize pathogen buildup in the soil that may lead to infection in subsequent years. It should be noted that seed treatments will not prevent *Fusarium* head blight from developing later on in the season due to residue-borne disease inoculum from neighbouring fields as the *Fusarium* disease is airborne and difficult to contain with 100 per cent assurance.

Under Saskatchewan's Pest Control Act all persons must "take measures to destroy, control and prevent the spread of all pests on any land or other premises owned, occupied or controlled" by them. Although *Fusarium* is not listed as a pest under the pest declaration regulations, it is still expected that farmers administer similar measures to ensure the containment of *Fusarium* as best they can. Doing so ensures that they receive the best possible yields from crops planted on their land and distributed to customers.

4:00

Concluding Saskatchewan's jurisdictional overview, I hope it's clear to everyone here today that measures in our own neighbouring province include buyer-beware standards as well as very

extensive research as to how *Fusarium* is best contained and prevented.

Now, Manitoba shares a similar jurisdictional background regarding *Fusarium*. *Fusarium* is not regulated, and therefore no tolerance has been set for seeds, and there is no difference between classes of seeds. Manitoba has released preventative measures regarding harvest techniques to reduce the presence of *Fusarium* as well as storage precautions and feeding guidelines. Along with their neighbours in Saskatchewan they emphasize the importance of seed testing and encourage the education of both producers and consumers.

Manitoba has the Plant Pests and Diseases Act. Although *Fusarium* is not stated in this act, the legislation does stipulate as follows: "No person owning, operating, leasing, or managing a nursery shall keep or have, or offer for exchange or sale . . . any diseased or [infected] plant or seed." The minister does have the power through regulation to designate a species, animal, or insect to be pests under the act. However, at present there are no regulations that outline *Fusarium* as being a pest.

As we have just reviewed jurisdictions within Canada with the highest *Fusarium* disease prevalence, we cannot ignore relevant agricultural jurisdictions in the United States. In North Dakota *Fusarium* head blight first became a significant problem in 1993 and since that time has contributed to over \$5 billion in losses. North Dakota State University has undertaken significant research activities and has developed and released three varieties of wheat that have some degree of *Fusarium* resistance or tolerance. Farmers are aware of the *Fusarium* head blight risk and are active in pursuing these types of seed varieties, according to the grain management experts in the area. All preventative measures are, again, at the producers' and consumers' discretion, and there are no regulations pertaining to the level of *Fusarium* found in seeds.

North Dakota does, however, show numerous initiatives that aim to lessen the financial burden on farmers and various other consumers. The United States wheat and barley initiative funds approximately 130 scientists in 22 states and Mexico who are collaborating to mitigate the *Fusarium* head blight epidemic. Funding for the program is obtained from earmarked funds through the United States Department of Agriculture and administered by Michigan State University.

Tolerance initiatives show that the issue of *Fusarium* head blight is strongly noticed among federal and state organizations. Experts in North Dakota have suggested that the regulation of *Fusarium* would be an unrealistic action because of its relatively high level of prevalence.

North Dakota also recommends multiple management strategies in order to mitigate the spread of *Fusarium*. These management strategies include seed treatment, tillage practices, crop rotation, and the use of fungicides. The state of North Dakota as well as other agricultural jurisdictions within the United States have never practiced a zero-tolerance policy regarding the level of *Fusarium* found in seed crops, as is the case here in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I hope that today I've been able to bring a heightened level of understanding and acknowledgement to the jurisdictional measures and regulations found in agricultural communities as they pertain to *Fusarium*. I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate on Bill 201.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and discuss Bill 201, Agricultural Pests (*Fusarium* Head

Blight) Amendment Act, 2014. I, too, have learned a lot since this bill was brought forward and talked about. It has been very, very interesting as I represent a large farming constituency as well, with huge amounts of irrigation land and large amounts of dry land and large amounts of ranching. I think I would say that at this point most of my constituents are very, very split as to what the outcome of this act should be. I've also noticed that in my caucus we're on a similar track, a lot of differences of opinions, and we've had a lot of great discussions. With that, of course, I commend the member for bringing this forward and giving us the opportunity to discuss it.

I understand that Manitoba loses somewhere between \$60 million and \$150 million a year because of *Fusarium graminearum* in their crops, a terrible situation that's led to where, I understand, many of their smaller animals, chickens and pigs, cannot eat the grain and digest it and flourish or even survive. Cows are more tolerant, but it's still not great. I understand that we're in a situation where trucks and trucks and tonnes and tonnes of contaminated grain get hauled both ways: our grain to their smaller animals so that they can continue their livestock industry from Alberta, and Manitoba grain to our Feedlot Alley and our feedlots and cattle industry, which have a higher tolerance. No doubt this costs our overall economy. This costs a lot of money overall when it just isn't kept local and within that old hundred-mile rule.

I understand, though, that a serious outbreak of *Fusarium graminearum* occurred in Manitoba in 1993. The province focused on developing resistant varieties rather than trying to control the spread of the disease, and there's a lot of thinking out there that this may have led to the continuation of Manitoba's problem, the growth of *Fusarium* in Manitoba, and \$60 million to \$100 million a year in lost value of crops.

I'm also told that there are nine or 10 varieties of seed right now from Saskatchewan and Manitoba that are resistant at no level or a lower level than one-half of 1 per cent, that could be part of the process of preventing the spread of *Fusarium*. Although I have tremendous empathy for farmers that have developed seed and have contaminated seed and cannot sell it, cannot plant it, it may not be the best long-term solution for us to keep the spread of *Fusarium* as low as possible or even end it totally.

A lot of my constituents that I've talked to have spent lots of time telling me about proper farm management. The four-cycle crop rotation is the best way to solve the problem, apparently. As the crop grows out of the ground, it picks it up and ends up in head blight, and just a proper rotation can go a long way to solving this problem.

As others said, the fact that we've had some wet, humid springs has caused some problems, and hence in parts of my constituency where irrigation is strong, that's why the irrigated lands would have a bigger problem. In parts of the south, where we don't normally have a lot of moisture, it maybe wouldn't be as big a problem.

Interestingly, I had a town hall on the weekend in Schuler-Hilda. One of the things we talked about was this bill. It's interesting to them because a number of them have land on both sides of the border. Most years go by without any impact from *Fusarium*, but a lot of them are aware that it could have a huge impact, and they had again some split ideas about: yeah, let's accept a low amount, and let's try to do something. Others, again, felt the best thing was to make sure that we had zero tolerance.

I'm spending a lot of time talking to a couple of people who are very, very strong agriculture producers, and they're telling me and assuring me that the provincial agricultural service boards, the committee, rather, set from these 71 boards, and the Alberta

Association of Agricultural Fieldmen and the majority of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties are opposed to this change. They believe that the pest control act is best as it is now, without allowing for any tolerance of Fusarium.

I've spent quite a bit of time talking to our agriculture critic about it, and he's highlighted for me the pros and cons and the differences and the different aspects. He has highlighted that there is a split, and there are strong components both ways. We talked about different zones in the province, which most Albertans do not feel will work, because we are all one Alberta. How do you enforce that? How do you draw the line? We've talked about different types of seeds, and it was good to hear that there are the nine or 10 varieties that have been proven effective with resistance at a lower level. Hopefully, that's the case, and hopefully that will solve our long-term problem.

Again, I'm concerned that Manitoba attempted to handle it in this way and is now ending up with \$60 million to \$100 million in losses annually in their agriculture products from grain. Interestingly, we just did a bit of a grain tour in Peace River country, where we had approximately 95 people come out and talk to us about provincial issues, rail issues, and that kind of thing. One of the things I heard in all four communities – Sexsmith, Spirit River, Falher, and Fairview – was that more grain is grown in . . .

4:10

Some Hon. Members: Falher.

Mr. Barnes: Falher? Thank you.

An Hon. Member: You have to say it with a French accent.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. Thank you for that.

They talked about how there's more grain grown in Peace River country than there is in all of Manitoba, which was absolute news to me. I lived in Manitoba till I was 13 years old and, like Saskatchewan, remember driving by wheat field after wheat field that looked very, very productive. It was actually only my second time in Peace River country, and there was tons of snow, but I was very, very impressed with how beautiful it was and how productive that area could be when I saw the wide, flat areas and all that moisture. That could go some distance.

I also took some time, and I have from the Canadian and the Alberta governments Fusarium Head Blight (FHB) of Cereals: A Disease of Concern For Alberta. Some of the things it says for managing Fusarium head blight are, number one, to plant seed with no detectable level of Fusarium graminearum. This prevents the accidental introduction of FG into noninfested fields. I presume that that is one of the big issues here for a disease that's spread by air and by soil and accidental infection in seeding plants, the unintended consequences of what can happen from neighbour to neighbour or district to district. At one point that, obviously, seemed to be a way to make sure that we didn't head the Manitoba way of \$60 million to \$100 million in annual losses.

Increase seeding rates. Less tillering leads to more uniform and shorter flowering periods, which minimizes the length of time during which heads are susceptible to Fusarium infection. Less tillering means less variation in crop growth stage, which may improve fungicide performance.

It talks about variety. Varieties with some degree of resistance are available, but they do not eliminate the risk. Consult annual provincial variety guides for current recommendations of FHB-resistant varieties.

Then it talks about the crop rotation that I just mentioned. Avoid planting new cereal crops next to a field where a Fusarium-infested cereal or corn resides. It's obviously picked up through

the air or picked up through the soil. Stagger planting dates. It talks about doing that to prevent the spread.

Irrigation management. Limit irrigation during the flowering period to reduce humidity in the canopy.

Fungicide application. Provide suppression only. May only reduce mycotoxin levels. Application at early heading and prior to Fusarium infection is critical.

Harvest management. Combine adjustment and postharvest management.

These are all this pamphlet really illustrates.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Would you please table five copies of the document that you were reading from tomorrow when we have tablings. Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to follow the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I'm sorry you couldn't finish.

I'm honoured to rise today, Madam Speaker, to continue debate on Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, which has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and I promise I will refrain from referencing arsenic levels in wine as that's probably not good for anybody to think about.

This bill deals with a topic that not everyone may be familiar with but should be aware of, Fusarium graminearum. Fusarium graminearum results in Fusarium head blight disease, which continues to be found primarily in southern Alberta's irrigated corn and wheat fields as well as farms in the Peace River district. Bill 201 seeks to reclassify Fusarium graminearum as a nuisance as opposed to a pest as well as to accept a .5 per cent tolerance level. This is to ensure that producers are exposed to current practices and policies to maintain Alberta's leadership in agriculture and to acknowledge the realities of Alberta's seed producers while enabling them to continue processing.

Currently the Alberta Fusarium graminearum management plan, which was released by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development back in 2002 after extensive public consultation, requires cereal grain intended for seed to be tested and certified free of Fusarium graminearum. In addition, landowners and seed, grain, and feed processors are tasked with the responsibility of controlling, destroying, or preventing the introduction of Fusarium as outlined in the Agricultural Pests Act and other regulations.

One group that brings all appropriate stakeholders to the table is the Fusarium Action Committee, or the FAC. The FAC provides a forum to represent the interests and views of Alberta's agricultural industry regarding the management of Fusarium graminearum. The FAC also recommends management strategies for Fusarium to be included in the Alberta Fusarium graminearum management plan and educates Alberta's crop and livestock industries about Fusarium and the threat it represents to producers, processors, and other stakeholders. The committee reviews and evaluates the Alberta Fusarium graminearum management plan in consultation with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development as required.

Fusarium Action Committee members include the Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen, the provincial Agricultural Service Board committee, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Alberta Seed Growers Association, the Association of Alberta Co-op Seed Cleaning Plants, the Alberta Grains Council, the Alberta Corn Committee, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, the Canadian seed association, the Alberta Beef Producers, and the Alberta Barley Commission.

Several FAC members have expressed concern over zero-tolerance legislation. One member, the Alberta Wheat Commission, has expressed frustration regarding Alberta's current zero-tolerance legislation on Fusarium. Directors of the Alberta Wheat Commission have passed a motion in support of establishing a zero-tolerance level for Fusarium that is greater than zero.

In November 2012 another FAC member, the Canadian Seed Trade Association, sent a letter to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development asking that a science-based review of Alberta's Fusarium management plan and the objectives of providing high-quality, competitively priced seed for Alberta farmers and facilitating trade be launched. The Canadian Seed Trade Association highlighted the fact that Alberta farmers were at a considerable disadvantage in relation to farmers in neighbouring provinces due to Alberta's Fusarium regulations as well as farmers being unable to access seed unless it's tested and found to have a nondetectable level of Fusarium. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development responded to this call in December 2012 by saying that he and his department were committed to minimizing the spread of Fusarium within Alberta, and he directed the FAC to lead a science-based review of the Fusarium management plan.

Another Fusarium Action Committee member, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, has discussed resolutions relating to Fusarium at their annual general meetings. During the 2012 AAMDC AGM resolution 6-13S, which declared Fusarium graminearum a pest under the Agricultural Pests Act and urged continued support for zero per cent tolerance, was defeated. In addition, resolution 5-13F, which also declared Fusarium a pest under the Agricultural Pests Act, urged the government of Alberta to amend the section of the act to include the following categories of pests: prohibited pests, pests, and nuisances. It was also defeated. The defeat of both of these resolutions illustrates that the debate surrounding acceptable levels of Fusarium continues.

In 2010 the then chair of the FAC, Dr. Jim Broach, who is also a pest management specialist with Alberta agriculture, said that the Agricultural Pests Act gives an area the option to apply to the minister for an exemption from nondetectable Fusarium. However, he said that the committee does not have the power to simply issue an exemption and that an area has to request an exemption.

At the last FAC, in 2012, there was no consensus on accepting a detectable level of Fusarium to which the entire province could adapt. This is due to the fact that southern Alberta had an increased incidence of the disease over the last few years while some parts of Alberta only reported trace levels. At the time parts of northern Alberta wanted to keep the nondetectable level on seed to prevent Fusarium from entering their area. As such, Agriculture and Rural Development retain the nondetectable of Fusarium on seed intended for propagation as referred to in section 22 of the Alberta pests act.

Last year the chair of the province's Fusarium Action Committee stated that the Fusarium management plan was being reviewed by plant pathologists. In addition, he noted that it was hard to guarantee that certified seed moving from Alberta and Saskatchewan was Fusarium free.

4:20

Madam Speaker, it's very evident that the debate regarding zero-tolerance Fusarium levels continues. On the one hand, it adversely impacts our farmers by giving our neighbours in other provinces who do not have zero-tolerance Fusarium levels a competitive advantage. It also hurts the agricultural community's important role in building Alberta and diversifying our economic base. On the other hand, I also recognize northern Alberta's con-

cerns about wanting to keep the nondetectable level on seed to prevent Fusarium from entering their area. The conversation on Fusarium must continue until an agreement satisfying all parties can be reached.

Once again, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for bringing forward Bill 201. Her passion for agricultural issues and concern regarding the future competitiveness and financial well-being of farmers is evidenced in this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 201 today. I'm going to speak a little bit differently about it rather than the growing of crops. I'm mainly a cattle producer, and there is some concern about feeding grain that has this Fusarium in it. Basically, our cows graze standing corn, and it's my understanding that a lot of the Fusarium is brought in by corn, so that's kind of where the problem started. I just started in the last couple of years, so it's not my fault that it came in. It's just been recently.

I would also like to see, you know, some inoculation for Fusarium within the corn so that we can stop that coming in because when cattle do eat it, it is a risk to cattle if they get a high enough concentration. Also, the birds: pheasants are a big concern in our area. We see a drastic decline in the number of pheasants. So when they're out feeding on the crops, we want to protect them also.

With the issue with the grains, the wheat and the barley, I think it's really important that we get a handle on this. You know, we can say that we want to keep the percentage at zero, but it's not going to happen. We're not there. We've got it, so now we have to deal with it, and I think this bill really goes to show a way that we are going to be handling this situation. It's very important. In my constituency there are hundreds of thousands of acres of crops being grown, and that's a lot of livelihoods. There's a lot of seed production in my area and families that sell seed with these companies and grow the seed, so it's a huge issue. I think, as some of the other members have stated, the Member for Little Bow, it's like getting the flu shot. It has to have a little bit in it to stop the spread, and I think this is a good example of how we can stop the spread. It is very important to all of Alberta.

It, you know, being an airborne issue, we can't stop the wind from blowing. I know there are many times in my area that we would like to stop the wind from blowing, but it doesn't seem to happen, so it's going to continue to become an issue. This is a good way to stop this issue or prevent it and do what we can. We can't just sit back and say that it's going to solve itself. It's not. We have to take some steps to ensure that we can protect our crops and our livelihoods, basically.

We see some issues in the cattle industry. You know, with the amount of grain being produced in Alberta, there are lots of cattle on feed. There are other diseases out there that we didn't have before, and all of a sudden we see them springing up in the area, so we have to be active and we have to find different vaccines. It's a continual progression in the vaccines that we use so that we can keep our herds safe, and this goes along with the safety of our herds, the safety of chickens. We have some chicken producers in our area and dairies and hog producers, and the different animals have a higher or lower tolerance for it.

It's definitely a very good process that the member is taking in getting this started. I think we can see by the number of people

who have spoken – we haven't heard anybody speak against it yet. If there is anybody against it, I'd like to hear their arguments of why they're against it. So far everybody is speaking for it. That's a good thing. You know, it's just finding the challenges and dealing with the challenges rather than trying to ignore them. We have to step up and do our part to protect Albertans and our livestock.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. The colleague across the aisle is a friend of mine. I had an opportunity to ride a combine for the first time this past summer and experience some of the agricultural issues and talk to some folks in her constituency. I'm always happy as an urban MLA to help support rural issues because they're really not rural issues; they're Alberta issues. They affect all of us if we want to have food on our plates.

Agriculture is Alberta's largest renewable industry. That is an important thing to note. It accounts for \$12 billion in farm cash receipts. That was in 2012 alone. I had a chance to spend some time with our agriculture minister out in the Medicine Hat area, an area that is very close to my heart. That was where I had my first television job and, certainly, where I had a chance to speak to a lot of constituents in that area about issues that they're dealing with out there. I know that the Bow Island area grows almost 100 per cent of the catnip in North America. Certainly, those areas are extremely important. Considering that Canada is quickly becoming one of the countries that produces more food than it consumes, more in-depth conversations on the state of agriculture in this province I think are essential.

Prior to my colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock bringing up the issue of Fusarium and bringing it to my attention, I must admit I was pretty naive about the intricacies of crop production and the issues that farmers face. Certainly, it's been an education for me. I was aware of the farmers' worries about precipitation levels, temperature fluctuations, and some of the other visibly tangible issues like hail damage, but knowledge of farmers also having to take into account risks that are not so visible to the naked eye, like Fusarium, was unknown to me. So that's why I applaud my colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for bringing this issue out for a very public and important discussion. It's essential for all Albertans, as I've said, rural and urban. To be aware of the complex issues that farmers face I think is important in order for them to be successful. It's important for all of us.

The purpose of the hon. member's bill is to reclassify Fusarium graminearum as a nuisance by amending the Agricultural Pests Act to accept a Fusarium tolerance of .5 per cent. Now, I'm a bit torn on how to side with the proposed changes in this bill. My fellow members of the Legislature have already brought valid points on both sides of the argument, and it leads me to think about what we can accomplish if we focus our efforts on new developments in seed technology. I know these things are happening in Alberta right now. I've had a chance to speak to some of the people who do this fine work, and I'm so glad that we have the level and depth of knowledge that we have on these technologies.

4:30

I've learned that Fusarium is not specific to wheat and barley, but it's also been rampant in basil and other herbs. I know that in the Bow Island area we certainly have some wonderful companies growing herbs out in that area. While Alberta's economy doesn't hinge on the success of the basil market, it's important to note that a leading researcher at the University of Massachusetts has been able to develop a Fusarium-resistant sweet basil. It's currently being monitored and retested in case the Fusarium fungus mutates and overcomes the resistant mechanism in the strain. However, no signs of this have surfaced.

Madam Speaker, I refer to this case because I know Alberta is a place where innovation and seed technology is essential to the continued growth and viability of the agriculture sector. I've driven throughout the province, and I've noticed the signs on land that is testing new strains of seed. When I see those signs, I often ask myself about how far we have come in agriculture because of the unwavering dedication of Albertans to innovation. I want to take the time to quote our hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who said that innovation and diversification in all of our sectors are the key to Alberta's long-term success. Nowhere is that more true than agriculture, already Alberta's second-largest industry.

Madam Speaker, that brings me back to the issue at hand about changing the acceptable levels of Fusarium in seed from zero tolerance to .5 per cent. I ask the question: is changing the levels the answer, or should we focus our efforts on solving the problem instead of finding a way to tolerate the problem? I understand the economic downfalls that face farmers when their seed is rejected because of detected Fusarium. However, where do we stop going down what could be a very slippery slope? So much like the breakthrough for the basil growers, we should be striving to develop a Fusarium-resistant strain of wheat to battle the spread of the fungus. With organizations like Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions, Alberta really does have the tools to target our pioneering background and work towards this growing fungal problem.

People often refer to the Alberta advantage based on our low tax rates in comparison to other jurisdictions, but I really think that the Alberta advantage is really about our human capital. Just last week Bill 1, the Savings Management Act, was tabled in the Legislature, and one of the highlights was the agriculture and food innovation endowment. The endowment fund highlights innovation and diversification as essential to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of our agriculture industry. It's a \$200 million endowment, and it provides enhanced funding for basic and applied agriculture research in Alberta, but it also supports value-added product development and commercialization activity.

Madam Speaker, is our solution to the Fusarium issue in maybe pairing our human capital with this endowment to produce a made-in-Alberta solution? Is our best course of action against an issue where members of this House have heard arguments extremely for and against – personally, I lean toward developing new seed technologies to aid in mitigating the spread of Fusarium. However, we know that new technologies don't happen quickly. In the meantime our farmers in southern Alberta are facing profit losses as Fusarium becomes more prevalent in the spread from our neighbours to the east. The importance of keeping our farmers competitive isn't just limited to their financial livelihood but the livelihood of Alberta's agriculture and the livelihood of people whose tables are filled by Alberta farmers. The success of farmers in the north is not mutually exclusive to the farmers in the south affected by Fusarium. We rise and fall as a province, and a

solution has to be found to address concerns on both sides of the argument.

Madam Speaker, I realize I'm not a leading expert on seed development, nor are any of my colleagues in this House. That's not our job as MLAs. Our job is to ensure that experts are provided with an environment that is conducive to economic success, to innovation, and to development in all the sectors. I think with respect to my aforementioned examples of organizations like Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions and our recently announced endowment fund that the House will continue to provide the environment to develop solutions to issues like Fusarium. Like with the oil sands technology and the vigour in northern Alberta, I'm confident that Alberta experts will develop a made-in-Alberta solution that will not only address the Fusarium issues at home but can be marketed around the world.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to all of the arguments my colleagues bring forward and hope we can address the best way to mitigate the Fusarium issue. Once again I thank the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for bringing this issue to the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, introduced by the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. I would like to thank the hon. member for her effort on this bill. As the minister of agriculture has often said, any time we discuss agricultural issues and raise the profile of agriculture, it is a good day, and I would agree with him.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of Bill 201 is to review and amend the Agricultural Pests Act. Currently the act prohibits any propagation and distribution of seed, root, bulb, tuber, or any other vegetable containing a pest. Fusarium graminearum and several other Fusarium species are plant pathogens that cause a serious fungal disease called Fusarium head blight, FHB. This disease affects wheat, barley, oats, and corn and, of course, lowers the quality, as we've heard over and over again today. Landowners and seed, grain, and feed processors have responsibility to control, destroy, or prevent the establishment of Fusarium as outlined in the act and respective regulation.

Madam Speaker, Fusarium is not new to Alberta producers. It's been present in Alberta since 1989. Initially it was found only at low levels. However, over the years there have been increased incidences in severity in parts of central and southern regions of the province, and in the last few years we have seen even more occurrences in the south.

As outlined in the Agricultural Pests Act, municipal authorities have the responsibility to enforce pest control and enhance management measures within their jurisdictions. Because of this we cannot ignore the input from our municipalities. I'd like to take this opportunity to address the positions of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. Madam Speaker, I understand that there is divided opinion among municipalities and counties regarding the zero-tolerance classification. Many farmers whose crop fields are free from this infection support the current zero-tolerance practice. This would allow them to better control the quality of the seed they buy and protect their land from Fusarium contamination. However, other producers, whose fields are infected with Fusarium, feel the pest act does not properly protect their interest. This puts Alberta seed growers at a disadvantage

because zero-tolerance for Fusarium would impede their productions.

As a result of this concern Fusarium has been a topic of resolutions at the past two Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties conventions. During the 2013 AGM resolution 6-13S, Fusarium graminearum, recommended that the association support the Alberta government's support for zero per cent tolerance for Fusarium graminearum. It states that crop producers and the agricultural industry in Alberta have experienced economic losses as a result of lowered-quality crops due to Fusarium. In addition, at certain concentrations Fusarium also presents a health risk to livestock. Therefore, the resolution urges the government to support mandatory testing for Fusarium graminearum prior to grains entering any seed cleaning plant or mobile cleaning unit, to prevent spreading the disease. This resolution was defeated. On the other hand, resolution 5-13F, Agricultural Pests Act – Fusarium graminearum, which supports the reclassification of Fusarium as a nuisance, was also defeated.

4:40

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development recognizes the impacts of Fusarium. After an extensive consultation in 2002 it released the first comprehensive Alberta Fusarium graminearum management plan. That's a mouthful. The management plan outlines the objectives of the government and other stakeholders to control and manage Fusarium. It states that "municipalities have the authority to enhance the standard for any named pest within their own jurisdiction," and the ultimate responsibility lies with "the owner or the occupant of the land." However, the reality is that in places where Fusarium has been found, the management plan is often ignored. Some municipalities and agricultural producers feel that a zero tolerance level of Fusarium is unattainable. In addition, it raises into question of the effectiveness of the management plan set out in 2002.

I have had the opportunity to meet with members of the Agricultural Service Board from across the province. I've met with members in my own community, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, in the agricultural community, and the members from my community are divided on this issue. We've heard that a couple of times here today, with members presenting different opinions. I know that many of my colleagues from northern Alberta are concerned about the change in the level.

But once again I would really like to thank the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for her hard work on this bill, because it raises an important issue that affects Alberta's agricultural sector. As I've mentioned earlier, municipalities and counties have expressed differing opinions on the proposed amendment due to each region's unique condition, and as I mentioned, the members of my community of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville are also divided.

As agriculture is our largest renewable resource, I would like to make an amendment, Madam Speaker. I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "That" and substituting the following:

Bill 201, the Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has moved an amendment to Bill 201. We'll pause for a moment while we distribute the amendment to each person.

Hon. members, this is a debatable motion, and any member who wishes to speak on this motion has up to 10 minutes to do so.

Mr. Donovan: I'd be more than happy to let my colleague from Edmonton-Centre get up to go on this.

I thank the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for this amendment, taking it to Resource Stewardship. Just a couple of clarification things on it, I guess, as my understanding is that this will be the first thing that goes up, and then it'll be dealt with right away. It kind of intrigues me a little bit, because I know there are some agricultural producers on that side of the floor that either have rented their farms out or are current farmers from northern Alberta, which kind of seems to be a bit of the split, and I haven't heard a whole lot from them. So maybe in Resource Stewardship they'll let their feelings be known, their thoughts of what some of their constituents think of it up there.

Now, it is interesting that this has been brought before the Fusarium Action Committee in Alberta to begin with, so it is nice to see that this might actually get dealt with right away. I assume that it's a very friendly amendment from one member to another on this, to be able to offer it. I'm getting the nod that, yeah, it looks to be a friendly amendment on that.

Now, I guess the question is on the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, the background of the people on that committee. I don't have the actual list in front of me of the people who are on that committee, to see what their background is on it. When you send something to committee, you want to make sure that the people on that committee have a good background in it because you don't generally send it to a committee just for input if they don't have any good history on it. It'd be interesting also to see where the minister is on this, if this is a direction that he sees it going, because then you'd wonder if it shouldn't maybe be a government bill rather than playing along with this.

The notice of amendment, I think, has some positives to it as long as there are people on the Resource Stewardship Committee that have a good background in it. I'm just not sure off the top of my head who's on that committee. I'm just trying to think. If I can buzz quickly – my colleague from Edmonton-Centre always has this kind of information. Oh, look at her. Thank you very much. As I look at this, there's definitely some – I mean, all colleagues in here are always good people on committees, or they wouldn't be on them. Just to make sure they have the background on it, I'm going through that.

Ms Blakeman: Hey, I'm on it.

Mr. Donovan: Right there alone, that makes it worth while.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. But I'm not a renowned expert in Fusarium.

Mr. Donovan: Never question somebody's quality on it.

But it is interesting to see that some of the people who have spoken in favour of it are on this committee. Also, it's good to see that there's a cross-section here. The Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley is also on here, which is good because I know his vast history in agriculture, and as a past producer he would definitely have something to add to it. One of the things there is to make sure that the committee is balanced out on what they're going to do with it.

One of the clarification points for the motion, though, is: what's the actual timeline for it to go to committee and come back? When my constituents ask me . . .

Mr. Campbell: Six months.

Mr. Donovan: Six months? That's pretty fast for government. That's not bad.

It's a process that we can go through. At least it's on the Order Paper, and something can be dealt with then. I was surprised that they hadn't come up with this revelation before they tabled the bill so that maybe the government motion could be on it. As long as the member that's presenting the bill is happy with that, I think there are some positives. At least it's moving forward.

So in six months, once that motion is done, it will come back this fall – I guess I'm making sure of the process – then it comes back to a committee, and then they'll have the report. Then, just to clarify, if the committee recommends it to go forward or they decide to six-pack it, what's the process from there if they allow it to go forward? I guess I'd just like clarification before I say that it's a good idea to go through that, to make sure that if, for instance, it goes to committee, the committee recommends back to us that we proceed with it: does that get done, then, this fall, or is it done when the committee presents their process?

Ms Blakeman: The following session.

Mr. Donovan: Okay. The following session, afterwards.

That's, I guess, some progress. If they decide to give it the old heave-ho, the committee does the same thing. They report back here, and then they report the recommendations from the committee back to this House. Is there a time, being new at the process of how this works, that we'd be able to raise the conversation again and go against what the committee has on it or that every MLA could vote on it in a standing vote, or it is purely a committee thing? It kind of lays all the cards on the table that way so that everybody would know what everybody was thinking and whether they're supporting it or not.

Ms Blakeman: They can come report back to the Assembly to keep going.

Mr. Donovan: To keep going.

So, for instance, if the committee brought it back – this is, I mean, a process question, and I'm glad we have such an abundance of knowledgeable people in here on how the process works. Sorry, Madam Speaker. If the committee comes back and says, "No, we don't recommend it," what's the process from there? What would be done with it? There's another motion, then, that you could go to from that. Even though the committee says, "We don't believe in it," we could actually make a motion to bring it forward and go from there. That's interesting. That's something I'd like to do.

4:50

Again, I don't want to see this get lost in the process, where maybe a couple of people don't think it's a good idea and it gets lost. I know this member has put a ton of work into this and, in all honesty, definitely has caused quite a debate amongst everybody in doing it. It has been a bit of a conversation piece in different parts of Alberta, and it's not that all southern Alberta people think it's great, as the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat had brought up. You know, there are definitely some producers in his area that are questioning the validity of the bill. It is good to see.

I think this is definitely something that we don't need to bury our head in the sand on; we need to actually deal with it. So I would support the amendment from the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to take it to the committee on resource stewardship according to Standing Order 74.2 and hope that that

actually gives us a full conversation on it and that we'll be able to come to the committee and give our recommendations and points also.

Those are my thoughts on it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a couple of quick points. First of all, I just want to make sure that the member understands that the minister for agriculture is in support of this going to committee, to answer his question.

I think the other thing that's important, Madam Speaker, is that the reason we go to committee is that we have a chance for experts and stakeholders to come and make their presentations. The makeup of the committee is not as important as the fact that people can come and make presentations to the committee, and then we have our well-rounded debate as to what the pros and cons are for this bill going forward. I'm not as concerned about who's on the committee as I am about who's going to come in front of the committee, and this gives us the ability to have these people come forward and actually educate Members of the Legislative Assembly on some of the pros and cons dealing with this important bill.

I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm not sure whether to support this or not. What used to happen in this House with motions and bills from private members who are on the government side was that they got hoisted, so they sort of disappeared into the netherworld, never to be seen again. Now we send them to committee, which I would like and hope to see as a positive move, but, I think, often it's fairly akin to simply hoisting the bill because it disappears forever and doesn't come back to the Assembly with any vigour, or it comes back with a recommendation not to proceed. I do recognize the amount of work that not only the sponsoring member but all of the members I've heard talking about this have put into this issue, and I really wish that we could get a better process so that we could get a decision.

We've just spent some time debating it. A lot of people have spent time talking about it. Now it's going to go to a committee which, you know, hopefully, is able to call on some experts, as the Government House Leader suggested, but at the end of that we get a real decision, one that the government can move forward on or not. But this sort of constant moving it around to different places: you just end up with no predictability on an issue and, frankly, very little ability for my colleagues to go back to their constituents and say, "The decision was this" and carry forward from there. We seem to spend a lot of time just kind of shuffling the issue itself around through a series of other parliamentary processes. I really hope that when this goes to the committee, it's able to do a thorough job on it, and it comes back with a very clear decision.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 201 carried]

Mr. Campbell: Madam Speaker, we can call it 5 o'clock, if you like, and move on to Motion 501.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we call it 5:00 and move on to Motion 501.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Combined Low Expenditure Assessments

501. Ms Blakeman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to distribute revenue from combined low expenditure assessments on a province-wide, per capita basis to municipalities, towns, districts, and counties.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am going to try to have less paper on my desk and try and do this off the computer. I hope it works.

Thank you very much, everyone, for being here to consider Motion 501, which I am moving on to the floor for debate. I can add Métis settlements in there. But what I mean is that what we know as the linear property tax or the industrial property tax, as collected currently, be redistributed on a per capita basis throughout the province.

When I approach issues, I often say: "Well, okay. Is there a problem? Does it need government participation to resolve it? Do they need to intervene, or do they need to create or take something away? Does this particular government process address the problem?" I would argue that, in fact, all three of those criteria are being fulfilled here. Yes, we have a problem. Municipalities are underfunded. What's a municipality? It's a higher density community of people that are sharing a smaller geographic area and a larger population. We would usually define it as a village or a town or a city. But it does not include a rural, sparsely populated area.

We have municipalities that are, given the tax tools that they have right now, unable to deal with growth – the bottom line is that everybody's yelling at them – and they're unable to provide the modern services that they want to. So if they want to try and be a greener municipality and provide public transit, for example, they're pressed to find enough money to do that. Certainly, the city of Edmonton was having to look, in the last budget, toward the government to get additional money to be able to fund the LRT, which is something that's very important to the citizens of Edmonton. We actually have a situation now where municipalities are told how much debt they can run. How indicative is that of a problem, that no one is told, "You can't run a deficit or a debt"? In fact, what the province says is: you can run a debt up to this amount. I think that's a very bad sign for how municipalities are being funded.

I want to stop here and extend my thanks to Don Good and North Darling and a number of mayors and councillors who have advised and educated me on this particular issue and over a number of years as well. I appreciate their sticking this out with me.

Much of this tax that I'm talking about, which is known under several names – combined low expenditure assessment or a linear property tax or an industrial property tax – is really rooted in history. Let me be clear here. I'm not talking about how the property is assessed. I'm not talking about what the mill rate is. I'm talking about redistributing the tax once it's collected. How it's assessed, how the mill rates are established, what the certain percentage is: that's a whole other conversation I am not having today. I'm talking about redistributing the final amount that is available from the collection of this particular tax.

I specifically am interested in redistributing this tax on a per capita basis so that every area would have access to the tax money and not, as is currently happening, quite a small number of people.

5:00

When I look at history – and let's look at work and productivity – in 1920 the GDP from agriculture was 75 per cent. The province changed a lot. By 2010 the GDP from agriculture was 1.8. So it went from 75 per cent to 1.8 per cent of the province. The population, which is the other part of this equation here, in 1900 was 75 per cent rural. That makes perfect sense. But in 2011 the population was 83 per cent urban. Just to note, Alberta is the third-highest urban population province in Canada, behind Ontario and B.C. We have a lot of people that live in urban areas.

What we've had is the population migrating from rural to urban, and we've had the money earned, or the productivity, move from agriculture to, in order, energy, finance and real estate, construction, business and commercial services, retail and wholesale, transportation and utilities, manufacturing, and so on down. At this point agriculture is the very last on the list.

Now, I want to be clear here that I am not dissing agriculture. I am not against family farms. I am not saying that agriculture isn't valued. I think it is valued. If anything, it's increasingly valued as we start to understand food safety, where our food is coming from, being able to know where it was grown. Is it organic food? Is it within the hundred miles diet? Is it within an area that we can get the food from if something was to happen? That has become increasingly important in everybody's book. This is not to say that agriculture and the production of agriculture is not valued. It is, and I want to be really clear about that.

What I'm talking about is a tax that is being collected based on a historic situation that no longer exists and happenstance. The access to this property tax or linear tax or CLEA has decreased as the populations have increased. In 1996 the urban areas accessed \$97.7 million. In 2010 we actually accessed less of this money: \$81.5 million. More people; less money. The rural areas in 1996 accessed \$463.6 million. In 2010 that had gone up to \$1,356,000,000. That's a lot, a lot of money.

Taxes are used by all levels of government to pay for the programs and services for their citizens. The province and the feds have access to income tax; the more people that are working or the more they're earning, the more money the province and the feds make without lifting a finger. The municipalities have very limited tax tools. Their biggest one is property tax, and property tax does not deal with growth.

Here we have a tax that is collected on entities that have little or no cost to the governing bodies. These linear taxes, for example, are collected on telecommunications systems, on transmission lines, on pipelines, on railways, on cogeneration, and on a machinery and equipment tax. That doesn't cost the local area very much. I mean, they don't maintain the railroads, for example, or the oil and gas wells or the pipelines. They maybe have to put in a road occasionally, but once the road is built, it's built. That's why these are called low-expenditure assessments. Once they're in there, it requires very little money to keep them up. To quote Dr. McMillan, an economics professor: linear property taxes are associated with no or, at best, relatively little additional expenditure; their effect is much like that of an unconditional grant to a community. So we have many people who cannot access much of this tax, and each year they access less of it.

Now, I spoke earlier about Albertans' very strong ethic about fairness, and I would say: is it fair that villages, towns, and cities get \$28 per person of linear taxes collected in this province but

rural, sparsely populated areas get \$1,930, almost \$2,000, per person? No, it's not fair.

It's not fair that the MD of Bonnyville and the county of St. Paul, which have inside those areas the towns of Bonnyville, St. Paul, and Elk Point and the summer villages of Glendon, Horseshoe Bay, Bonnyville Beach, and Pelican Narrows – well, the MD and the county have 50 per cent of the regional population, but they access 78 per cent of the regional property tax.

So I ask for your support in urging the government to redistribute this particular tax. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to participate in the debate on Motion 501, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Motion 501 reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to distribute revenue from combined low expenditure assessments on a province-wide, per capita basis to municipalities, towns, districts, and counties.

At first glance this seems like a somewhat harmless motion, but if you examine it closely, there are many potential issues here. Madam Speaker, I'd like to take a couple of minutes just to outline some of those issues.

First of all, a little background would help. The term "low-expenditure assessment" was coined by a former Peace River councillor, but it is not a term that is used by the government of Alberta nor anyone else. Low-expenditure assessments refer to linear properties – machinery and equipment, electrical cogeneration facilities, and railway properties – most of which are located in rural municipalities such as a municipal district or county.

The problem with this, Madam Speaker, is that this statement that low-expenditure assessments come with no cost to municipalities is simply not true. These counties have roads to maintain; these linear assessments all have infrastructure surrounding them. Simply because you're not out there on a daily basis maintaining something doesn't mean that it doesn't come with a cost. Maintaining the road is not a matter of building the road and then it's done. With the amount of equipment moving on these roads to maintain those linear assessments and also to keep industry moving in rural Alberta, those roads as well as the bridges and the other infrastructure are under constant repair and rebuilding.

The councillor argued that these properties generate significant property tax revenues from the municipalities in which they are located while requiring minimal or no expenditures for municipal services. Well, part of that statement is true. They can provide significant tax revenue for those municipalities, but those municipalities all pass budgets that include those assessments, as every other municipality does. That means that those revenues are poured back into that municipality, and they're used to maintain the infrastructure required.

The rural municipalities that have access to a lot of the linear assessments use those revenues to create economic opportunity in rural Alberta. I don't think we can understate the importance of that. With \$77 billion a year being generated by rural Alberta, rural Alberta is truly the engine here driving the rest of this province. We have to understand that this money from linear assessments helps to drive that engine. It helps to keep it going. To suggest that we would somehow ask rural municipalities to tax their industry, tax their linear assessment property owners and that you would then take that money away from those counties and redistribute it – let's face it. Anytime we redistribute anything in

this province on a per capita basis, it's great for Edmonton and Calgary and a couple of other larger centres, but the rest of Alberta gets nothing out of that. That's exactly what would happen here.

5:10

Rural Alberta needs the support of linear assessments in order to revitalize their towns, their communities, and their villages. They work together, with each other, and that's where the solution to this lies. It doesn't lie in taking something away from one and redistributing it on some kind of a social program to the rest of Alberta. What it does come from is that working together with each municipality, allowing them to work on solutions on their regional basis, on their own terms is by far the best way to go with this, Madam Speaker.

To legislate this, to suggest that we would be forcing mostly counties to be giving up their linear assessments in order to benefit all of Alberta, is certainly not fair to anyone in those counties. Taking the wealth from rural Alberta and distributing it in larger urban centres: well, that may be fair in the eyes of urban centres, but it's certainly not fair in the eyes of rural Alberta.

I would encourage all members to vote against this motion not because it's not an issue, not because it's not something that we do need to address. We do need to talk about this, and we do need to be constantly encouraging municipalities to get together, to form the partnerships, the alliances that make for a healthy rural Alberta. But this is truly the wrong method to do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address Motion 501, and I thank both the Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing it forward and my colleague from Banff-Cochrane for adding to the debate.

Here's what we know, Madam Speaker. We know that all municipalities in Alberta are feeling the pain of chronic under-funding. We know that the current patchwork of grants is not sufficient for them. We know that this Premier and this government promised that MSI funding would go up across the board and that that promise was subsequently broken upon last year's budget. We know that there was a small bump in last week's budget, but it was certainly not enough to make up for the funding inequities that exist in our province.

Now, as a result of some of these things that we know, my colleagues and I in the last election and recently reannounced our 10-10 community infrastructure transfer. What that provides is stable, long-term block funding for municipalities, Madam Speaker. It takes the five main grants that this government currently has, whether that be MSI, waste water, GreenTRIP, strategic transportation grants, combines them all into one, and then divvies that up in a formula that would be somewhat similar to the MSI formula that is currently in place.

We don't necessarily know that the MSI formula is perfect. We're currently in the process of asking all municipalities across this province to give us their feedback on that formula. What we do know is that the MSI formula is far more fair and equitable than just a simple per capita distribution. I would suggest that this motion is doomed to fail on a number of levels. Distribution on a per capita basis would be completely inequitable to rural Alberta, and it's certainly not a formula that we would ever support in terms of municipal funding. We know that right now they take in, for example, the number of kilometres of roads that various

municipalities in rural communities have to maintain. It's one of many things, but redistributing this wealth on just a per capita basis is not acceptable.

What this motion is really proposing is a massive redistribution of wealth. I can understand why many individuals in urban centres would look at this and salivate at the thought of more money because there are funding shortfalls across this province for our municipalities. But I would remind members in this Assembly that those who do not learn their history are doomed to repeat it, and I bring up an example of a parallel I would like to share about what history can teach us around a system like this.

In 1980, Madam Speaker, due to a disagreement on revenue sharing between Alberta and the federal government, the federal government unilaterally imposed something, that has been very well known here in Alberta, called the national energy program. Now, the Liberal mindset of the federal government in Ontario and based in Quebec was that Alberta had a small population that could not influence the outcome of an election with the few seats that they had to offer. So why should this rural province have all this additional wealth that it was able to generate based on the oil and gas sector? At the time revenues were going up dramatically.

So what the federal government decided to do was take this massive amount of wealth unilaterally and to redistribute it. One of the problems with that – obviously, there are a number of them – is that there hasn't been a Liberal MP elected in this province since that ill-advised plan. It created severe distrust of the federal government here in Alberta, and it begs the question: why would we ever consider doing the exact same thing right here within our province?

Now, I have grown to respect the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that, you know, a member of the Liberal Party of Alberta would put forward a motion that would emulate the theory of Pierre Trudeau around redistribution of wealth. It is, without question, one of the most infamous attacks on our province. If you ask any Albertan about their thoughts on the national energy program, they would label it one of the most divisive, detested, disrespectful, and contemptuous policies in the history of our country. I just don't believe that recreating a system like that by taking this wealth from our rural communities is the answer.

Is there a problem? Perhaps there is a problem. We've identified that. We've agreed on that. The Member for Edmonton-Centre outlined that there is a problem in that municipalities are underfunded – we certainly agree with that – but we do not accept nor do we support the idea that taking the combined low expense assessment, or the linear assessment, away from our rural counties and redistributing on a per capita basis is the answer to that problem.

Accepting or supporting this motion I believe would be a mistake. I cannot support it, our party cannot support it, and I would encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 501, being brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. As we have heard today, Motion 501 urges the government to distribute revenue from combined low expenditure assessments, or CLEA, on a province-wide, per capita basis to municipalities, towns, districts, and counties.

Madam Speaker, I feel that the conversation we are having today is very timely since last week our government introduced

our back-in-black budget. Our plan to keep building a stronger and economically attractive Alberta was conveyed by the minister of Treasury Board and Finance. The government's budget for 2014 contains essential funding for both urban and rural municipalities. For instance, municipalities will receive more than \$2 billion in direct funding from government in the '14-15 budget.

There will be an increase of \$150 million over the next three years for the municipal sustainability initiative in capital. Our government will also be able to rehabilitate 2,500 kilometres of existing provincial highways, assets that help, yes, to better facilitate the flow of goods between our province and our neighbours to the south.

Yes, Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for allowing us to highlight the many funding initiatives our government has in place to help all municipalities, be they urban or rural, to succeed and thrive.

With regard to Motion 501's focus on revenue from combined low expenditure assessment I believe it would be pertinent to discuss the variety of municipal assessment types. Assessment types can include residential, farmland, nonresidential, nonresidential linear, nonresidential railway, nonresidential cogenerating, and machinery and equipment.

Linear properties are considered properties that have distribution lines or other facilities and may cross municipal boundaries. Some examples include oil and gas wells, petroleum pipelines, electric power systems, telecommunication systems, and cable television systems. Underground tanks, fuel scrubbers, compressors, chemical injectors, and metering equipment, for instance, fall under machinery and equipment. Local assessors are in charge of assessing most machinery. The assessor, who is designated by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, is responsible for assessing machinery and equipment forming part of linear property.

5:20

Railway property value is assessed at a fixed dollar amount per kilometre based on the annual tonnage transported on the rail right-of-way. Rail companies must report yearly to the local assessor the type and length of line in each municipality, and the railway property is assessed by the local assessors.

High expenditure assessment types include residential, farmland, and nonresidential, and they are considered high expenditure assessment sources. Low expenditure assessment sources include nonresidential linear, nonresidential railway, nonresidential generating, and machinery and equipment. These four types of low expenditure assessments combined form the low expenditure assessment.

Madam Speaker, most low expenditure assessments are located in rural municipalities. Albertans living in rural areas depend on the property taxes generated from these facilities, and they are used to fund essential infrastructure in those areas. A per capita redistribution of these revenues would debilitate these areas as millions of dollars would be rerouted from rural to urban centres. This would create a definitive divide between rural and urban Albertans. Our government respects and recognizes the autonomy of local governments and has the utmost faith that municipalities are positioned to make the best decisions for their citizens.

Again, our government has in place funding that strengthens both urban and rural municipalities. We must foster a united Alberta by strengthening ties with all municipalities, not just a select few.

I thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for allowing us to undertake this discussion, and I look forward to hearing the views of my colleagues during the rest of today's debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support Motion 501. The reason I rise to support Motion 501 is because it's about equality and fairness. As you know, combined low expenditure assessments such as power lines, rail lines, communications, nonresidential cogeneration, telephone lines, telecommunication lines, and oil and gas wells require very minimal expenditure from any municipality. Every Albertan in this province builds this province, whether you're in Edmonton or Calgary or Two Hills or Peace River or the municipal districts and counties. We all build this great province, and we are all in this together. We need to build our towns and our cities and our municipalities.

Now, the Alberta Liberal caucus was given evidence by Deputy Mayor North Darling from Peace River and Don Good, also from the Peace River area. The evidence was that of \$1.5 billion worth of taxes, only 6 per cent of them went to 83 per cent of the population. Alberta used to be a very rural province. In fact, this country used to be a very rural country. But this province and this country are very urban. There has been a tremendous growth in urban Canada and urban Alberta. Eighty-three per cent of Albertans live in urban Alberta.

Madam Speaker, in an equal and fair and just society how is it possible that 83 per cent of Albertans, when we all build this province together, only get 6 per cent of the taxation and that 17 per cent of Alberta gets 94 per cent of the taxation, which is approximately \$1.419 billion a year, on an annual basis?

The city of Edmonton is the hub for northern Alberta. We understand how important it is to work with northern Alberta. Their success is our success, and for those who live in Edmonton, Edmonton's success is northern Alberta's success. We're all in this together.

The city leaders are in dire need of sustainable, predictable funding to build roads and bridges and for Edmonton and Calgary the LRT. We need to move large numbers of people from all over the province and all over the country, who come to share in our prosperity, to work. We need to get them to work and get them back home. We needed our LRT a decade ago, and we need it today.

If this tax was fairly distributed on a per capita basis, that would mean \$260 million out of \$1.5 billion for the capital city of the greatest province in the country. That's it: \$260 million. That's not a lot out of \$1.5 billion. That would buy us about 2.6 to three kilometres of LRT track each and every year. Edmonton and Calgary having a good LRT system benefits all of us in this province. It takes cars off the roads, so roads won't need to be repaired so much. It reduces the amount of carbon pollution and emissions. You know what? When you have a good LRT system, people can actually get to work quicker, faster. We'll have fewer accidents on the roads. People can actually do a little bit of work when they're riding the train. Hey, they can even talk on their cellphone if they like.

Madam Speaker, this issue is the fact that this province has changed and this country has changed, and when there's change, policy must change. Maintaining an old policy that unfairly distributes \$1.5 billion – we have to change.

Many of my colleagues from the Wildrose, you know, are from rural Alberta. I really appreciate the work that everyone in rural Alberta does, whether it's agriculture, the oil and gas industry. I grew up in a rural town in a farming area in a different country. I grew up in a small town in Squamish, B.C., worked in the mill. I recognize the challenges of smaller areas. I also live in the capital

city in the best province and in the best country in the world. I recognize challenges in the city.

You know, I certainly hope the MLAs in the other political parties from Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and Peace River would support this policy because this policy will go to help the areas that they represent. There are many areas in rural Alberta that don't get the share of linear taxation. It's not just urban versus rural. There are many rural communities that do not get their fair share when they all helped build this province together. This is the fundamental issue of: how do we build this province moving forward?

Madam Speaker, I guess the question is: is it fair, you know, for all the MDs and counties, that constitute 12.7 per cent of the population, to get 61.5 per cent of the funding? I can understand the economic policy of the Conservatives. It's all about trickle-down economics, right? Give a handful of people a billion dollars, and tell everybody else to eat cake. They think everything is going to trickle down to the average guy.

That's where the Alberta Liberals differ from these two Conservative parties in the House. We believe in equality of opportunity, that everyone should be given a fair chance. We believe that we're all in this together, okay? I certainly hope that the hon. members from both political parties will not be united in opposing this together. In fact, I think you should be united in supporting this together.

Most of the hon. members elected here from cities and towns from across the province: this would benefit the very citizens that you represent and help build the very cities and towns that you represent and get their leaders the essential funding that they need so they can build their infrastructure. Infrastructure is so essential, to have that sustainable, predictable funding, because infrastructure is an economic enabler. It helps to grow our economy all across the province.

5:30

Madam Speaker, to be the capital city of the greatest province in the world – you know, the roads have been in a state of disrepair. Municipal leaders have not been given the funding by this provincial government over the years. Mayors Iveson and Nenshi are not happy with the budget. They believe that they need the tools. Whether it's the tax tools, they need a fair share of revenue across this province so they can do their job. They understand that if they get a fair share of revenue on a regular basis – sustainable, predictable funding – our economy can go to the next level, and we can deal with the environmental issues. With a nice LRT system in Edmonton and Calgary our smaller cities can use this funding in other ways, maybe liquid natural gas buses. Our municipalities right now have about \$8 billion of debt and about \$24 billion of deferred infrastructure projects, plus or minus a couple of billion.

I ask every member here to say if it is fair, if it is right to have a disproportionate share of this go to 13 per cent of the people and the rest of Albertans . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Motion 501, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

This motion calls for the government to ensure that urban municipalities receive their share of revenue from the combined

low expenditure assessment, or CLEA. The motion will seek to do this, in turn, by ensuring that revenue is distributed on a province-wide, per capita basis.

Madam Speaker, there are multiple municipal assessment types, ranging from residential to farmland to various other nonresidential types. When considering a more complex topic such as the one which is the subject of this motion, it may be helpful to gain a broad perspective on how similar issues have been dealt with in other areas. Other jurisdictions in Canada, particularly Nova Scotia and British Columbia, have undertaken reviews of property taxation. Nova Scotia has a tax cap system for residential properties. This has been a point of contention within the business community as assessments for commercial properties have risen steeply in some areas while residential properties have not. This can place what is often seen as an undue burden on small local businesses. Several reports and studies on the CAP system have been issues within recent years. This includes the 2010-2011 review of the Nova Scotia capped assessment program.

Nova Scotia has also amended the Municipal Government Act to allow for phasing out of the business occupancy tax over several years. The 25 per cent category included hotels, motels, restaurants, campgrounds, service stations, and motor vehicle dealerships, which were eliminated in 2006. The 50 per cent category included all other businesses except for financial institutions, which were phased out over five years and eliminated in 2010. The 75 per cent category included financial institutions such as banks, trust companies, insurance companies, credit unions, and loan or investment companies, which were eliminated in 2013.

Currently a review of the property tax system is under way, which was commissioned by the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, the Association of Municipal Administrators, and the Property Valuation Services Corporation. The review is aimed at figuring out the best way in which to share the cost of providing local services.

Another noteworthy jurisdiction that has dealt with this issue is British Columbia. In 2010 a major industrial property steering committee was formed, and its work focused primarily on municipal property taxation of major industrial properties. The joint review was established by the province, the Union of BC Municipalities, and industry. A need was identified to make property taxes more conducive to investment while assuring local government services were provided fairly for all taxpayers. What the property tax reviews of British Columbia have in common is that they are co-operative in nature. This is in contrast to the idea of CLEA here in Alberta as the Nova Scotian and British Columbian reviews do not seek to pit municipalities against one another.

A potential shortcoming associated with the motion currently being considered by this House is the possibility that it could decrease the amount of revenue that specialized municipal districts and counties receive. Madam Speaker, we ought to be cognizant lest we stoke divisions between urban and rural municipalities needlessly. This motion carries with it the potential ramification that the financial health and economic viability of rural municipalities could be negatively impacted, which would do little to improve a co-operative spirit between urban and rural municipalities. The needs of urban and rural municipalities are not simply quantitatively but are also qualitatively distinct from one another.

Clearly, the distribution of funds on a per capita basis would favour urban municipalities, but this means of distribution may not be sensitive enough to address the different needs and circumstances of rural communities. While populations across the

province may vary, requirements for infrastructure may be radically different and indeed quite expensive. I will not go into that at great length, Madam Speaker, but I do want to emphasize that per capita distribution alone may not be the most holistic way of approaching the problem.

I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. While the matter is certainly worthy of consideration, I believe alternative avenues may hold better prospects for all Albertans.

With this, I conclude my remarks and anticipate the remainder of the debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to take this opportunity to speak to this motion today. As a former municipal councillor I have a great deal of heart into some of the words I'm going to express in a few moments.

Firstly, I'm opposed to this motion. I feel this is a very complex issue that has been raised. It's a good issue, but it requires a different solution than what has been proposed. As it stands, I think this motion fails to consider there are significant costs in other municipalities, especially rural. You can't just look at the revenues alone. You have to look at the whole picture.

Let's face it. Today we live in a growing society. There are huge demands on our systems and our municipalities and our lifestyles. There are certainly a lot of wonderful things that we do wish to have in our municipalities to support those lifestyles, and they cost a lot of money. Certainly, we have to figure out a way to fund these things that is fair – I certainly do agree with that – but we do not need to be hindering or robbing Peter to pay Paul. That just does not work, in my view. The MSI funding that we've had for the past few years has worked to a certain degree. Although there are some deficits and it may need some tweaking, there are certainly some other things we can do, including, by the way, our proposal in Wildrose with our 10-10 plan, that would provide an increase in funding, sustainable and predictable as well.

Nonetheless, we still have to look at how the other municipalities work. They do have in the rural areas a high amount of costs. Just let me express some of those costs to you. I don't know if the Member for Edmonton-Centre has considered that the infrastructure alone in rural municipalities is huge. They have 72 per cent of Alberta's roads. They have 59 per cent of the bridges, and some of these things can cost a half mil to a million dollars per kilometre to build and maintain. These are enormous, yet they have small populations. They have small amounts of commercial property. They have lesser amounts of a tax base compared to a huge city like Edmonton. How can you take away the funding that they depend on to maintain all these roads that all Albertans wish to use and not replace it with something for them? If you're going to take it away, you have to replace it with something else. Our 10-10 plan would provide that.

I would suggest to the House that regardless of the solution, this particular solution is not going to be the answer. There are a number of things that we can do together, I think, to improve the revenue stream, but taking the linear assessment and some of the other things that they're indicating that they want to combine with it in this plan is definitely not the way to go. Therefore, I cannot support this proposal, and I urge the rest of the House to consider that in their voting this afternoon.

Thank you.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many of the comments that I was going to make have already been said; however, I think some of them bear repeating. I will not be supporting the motion. As a municipal politician in a small urban municipality for 11 years I am well aware of the underfunding in all municipalities, not just Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer but the villages, towns. We're all suffering, some to a lesser extent than others, but still we're suffering.

As an AUMA board member for 11 of those years as well, along with my colleague from Banff-Cochrane, who has spoken very well on the issue – I think that he has mentioned much of what I would have said. He pointed out many of those issues. Cities like Edmonton and Calgary do have special needs; there's no question. My little village of Beiseker is not going to be putting in an LRT system any time soon, but we do have infrastructure problems. We have infrastructure deficits. There are programs that can help those situations. The GreenTRIP should be carried on. That can fund those types of special transportation issues.

In early spring of last year I did a tour as a Municipal Affairs critic in northern Alberta, and I talked to urban centres. I talked to rural MDs and counties. Yes, there are lot of MDs and counties that have a real high linear tax assessment base, but there are others that don't. So it's not an equal amount everywhere we go. Like my colleague, I don't believe in robbing Peter to pay Paul. I don't think the issue is that Peter has too much. I think the issue that we should address is that Paul doesn't have enough. How do we fix that issue? I firmly believe that the Wildrose 10-10 plan will do that. We will bring that municipal funding up to where MSI should have been, as was promised us many years ago. We will bring that up and add to it.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre, when she made her opening comments regarding the CLEA, or the combined low expenditure assessment, made a statement that I think she may want to retract. She included industrial assessment in her opening statements. She might want to be careful what she wishes for because Edmonton, I'm sure, has a very high industrial tax assessment. Does she want to share that with the rest of us? I wouldn't think so.

Just to get back to our 10-10 plan here, we will sit with both associations, and we'll come up with a formula based on, I would suspect, much like how MSI is distributed now, with some tweaking, and we'll come to a consensus with both associations so that all municipalities in the province going forward receive substantial funding increases so that they can address all of their issues as well.

I'm sorry, but I cannot support this motion, and I would encourage others not to either. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise, to be here today to talk about this important issue. I can certainly tell you that in my riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner, which contains lots of small communities, every community that I go to has an idea about how to spend the money that the county or the MD has.

It reminds me of the story that's told about Vice-president Biden in the last presidential election in the U.S., when it came out that Mitt Romney, the other candidate, had donated \$3 million in charitable donations the previous year whereas Vice-president

Biden had contributed an awful lot less, somewhere in the order of \$300. When he was asked about this, he said that, well, yeah, sure; I've only donated \$300 of my own money, but I've donated \$50 million of yours.

I think that it's common practice to be willing to look at what somebody else has and to find a way to spend that for them. Certainly, the small municipalities and the larger ones in our province are underfunded, but I don't think this is the solution to that. There may be one or two counties that do have an excess of funds, but I can guarantee you that the majority of the counties do not. As has been mentioned, they have great expenses as well with a small population. One size simply does not fit all.

We know that the province has downloaded additional responsibilities onto counties and MDs as well as municipalities, and they haven't maintained the funding to the appropriate level. In my own little village of Stirling, for example, and in the villages and towns surrounding us, they were hit hard during this current budget year, the one that's just ending, and had to make significant cuts. People lost their jobs, people had to work extra hard, and of course if it wasn't for the spirit of volunteerism that's so common in small towns, likely we wouldn't have been able to accomplish as much as we were able to do.

One of the issues that we have with part of the current funding approach, with the grants, is that you have an awful lot of creative writing taking effect in these communities, with grant application writers trying to pound the round peg of their need into the square hole of the grant that's available, and that's a waste of time and energy. We need to improve the funding model so that it's level and it's predictable and it does address the additional responsibilities that have been downloaded onto our communities, all of the communities. There's no question that our major centres, Calgary and Edmonton for example, have tremendous needs and are underfunded, but I think that the issue is where the funding should come from. We certainly know that they do need to have more money coming back their way.

My company was one of the oil field service companies that endured the national energy program and survived. I went to Ottawa, in fact, and met with the energy minister, Marc Lalonde, to discuss why he was doing something that was so arbitrary and so harmful to western Canada, particularly Alberta. He didn't have any satisfactory answers. He basically said that he was putting us in our place, that we were getting too big for our britches. That wasn't a very satisfactory answer. It wasn't very comforting either because we were laying off people. We had families that were impacted by this.

I just don't think that the solution that's being proposed is the proper solution. The problem exists, and it's genuine, but the problem isn't that some counties have too much money. The problem is that communities, municipalities need to be better funded by the province, and there are ways to do this. One of the ways that you address issues like this, when revenues are the issue – it's probably true at the municipal level, too, but we certainly know it's true at the provincial level, and it's true for every business, and every businessman knows this – is that you cut your overhead when revenues are hurt. You don't cut your ability to provide the services. We've got a lot of overhead, I think, and a lot of waste in a lot of areas that need to be examined before we go about redistributing other people's wealth.

I certainly won't be supporting this, but I appreciate it being raised because it gives us an opportunity to talk about these issues, that are very real. Solutions need to be found. I just don't happen to think that this is the solution.

Thank you.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and talk about Motion 501. For all the good reasons heard on both sides of the House, I too am against Motion 501.

I do want to highlight three things, though, first of all how the current system is working anyway. In my constituency I have two counties, Cypress county and Forty Mile county. I bumped into one of the county councillors on the weekend, and we discussed this briefly. He pointed out to me how his county had given some side of \$700,000 to the new Medicine Hat Arena, had given considerable financial help to our Esplanade in downtown Medicine Hat, which is the pride of arts and culture, and on the north side of town, close to Redcliff, had given considerable money to our Family Leisure Centre.

He also informed me that Forty Mile county, Redcliff, Bow Island, and Foremost, all the municipalities in my constituency, were great supporters of these things and had sat with the people in Medicine Hat and Redcliff and worked these things all out on a cost-sharing basis and on a fair basis.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate on Motion 501.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to close this debate. Well, this was just so much fun. I'm really, really glad I brought this forward because this is an issue that I have been concerned about for some time. Some of you may remember that I brought forward a bill in 2009 – it's kind of like the Wildrose's but not as bad – looking to take a piece of the personal income tax and set it aside in a fund that could be redistributed to municipal areas.

I'm still trying. I'm willing to stand up for urban Albertans. I will do that. I am sorry that I have so many colleagues who will not, but that is certainly what we've seen today, and it does really crystallize for me part of the problem that we are having in Alberta.

I've heard a number of people stand up and say: "Oh, we have so much infrastructure we have to pay for. We really need all of that money." Well, not exactly, actually, because the provincial government is responsible for highways and secondary roads outside of municipalities. The municipality is paying for four or five blocks' or 10 or 20 blocks' worth of roads inside of their municipality, exactly the same way the city of Edmonton is, but they're not paying for miles and miles and miles of highways or bridges. That's what the province does. That's what that tax money is paying for. So don't tell me that this linear tax is needed for municipalities to pay for this stuff because it's not true.

"Everybody needs – needs – this tax for what they're going to do." Yeah, well, so do the urban areas. They need it as well and just as much. "Well, we need it for economic development because we're doing so badly in rural Alberta that we just need extra to help us with economic development and to revitalize." Well, you know what, kids? Edmonton and Calgary, Sundre, Whitecourt, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and any number of other towns, villages, and cities would also like to revitalize. Nobody is giving them money. No, because

we want to keep it in sparsely populated rural MDs and counties so they can have economic development all on their own.

“Well, we shouldn’t rob Peter to pay Paul.” Hmm. Well, folks, guess what? That goes both ways. The populated municipalities have been forgoing this revenue for a considerable period of time so that Peter could take all the money that Paul didn’t get. So I don’t buy that argument either.

Once again, we, I and the Liberal caucus, are willing to stand up for urban Albertans. We will admit that there is a problem, and I have now brought two solutions forward to this House, only to hear them always knocked down by people that are representing large tracts of rural Alberta. Most interesting. What does that tell us? And no one else has another suggestion. “Oh, you can’t do this. Don’t touch my stuff. Good idea. Just don’t do it this way.” But no one has another suggestion of what to do, so I invite them to actually come up and do the work with another suggestion.

The Member for Stony Plain suggested that the MSI was great and that the government had given all the MSI money and that that’s all everybody needed. Oh, for heaven’s sake. Give your head a shake. There is exactly the same amount of money for MSI in this budget as there was last budget and the budget before that. There is \$900 million in the budget for MSI funding. Please refer to page 174 of the estimates book and to vote 3.2, municipal sustainability initiative capital, \$871,000,000. Eight hundred and seventy-one million dollars.

What they’ve done that’s tricky this year is that they added in a grant that has always been given but not coupled with the MSI. So now we’ve got the basic municipal transportation grant added in there, and we get a subtotal there of \$1.2 billion. But not all of it is municipal funding. That’s including a grant that’s always been somewhere else. So there’s been no increase in MSI funding, and there isn’t going to be.

This government has never managed to come up to what they’ve been promising all the way along, and before this budget came out, they were promising \$1.6 billion. Did they meet that? No. So how exactly are these municipal areas – towns, villages, summer villages, Métis settlements, larger cities, smaller cities –

supposed to get this funding out of MSI when there’s been absolutely no increase whatsoever? [Ms Blakeman’s speaking time expired] Oh, darn. I was having so much fun.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:57 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Quadri	Xiao
Brown	Sherman	Young
Hehr		

Against the motion:

Allen	Horne	Olesen
Barnes	Horner	Quest
Bhardwaj	Jeneroux	Rowe
Bikman	Johnson	Sandhu
Calahasen	Khan	Sarich
Campbell	Kubinec	Scott
Casey	Lemke	Starke
Dallas	Leskiw	Stier
Dorward	Luan	Towle
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Fenske	McDonald	Weadick
Goudreau	Oberle	Wilson
Griffiths		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 37
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:09 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 10, 2014

Issue 6e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 10, 2014

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance it's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 2, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014.

The government is requesting approximately \$2,014,000,000 for operational costs, \$223 million for capital projects, and \$11 million for financial transactions. These amounts are necessary for the government to fulfill both its commitments for the southern Alberta flood relief during the current fiscal year as well as several initiatives and activities that are more typical of the government's more routine business.

The largest portion of these amounts, some \$1.3 billion, relates to flood recovery activities such as continuing flood recovery activities to provide support and assistance to Alberta residents and municipalities; housing assistance for First Nations communities; repair or replacement of highways and education, health, and other facilities; and floodway cleanup and stabilization and restoration projects to address erosion damage.

The additional amounts mainly relate to unexpected increases in student enrolment in public and separate schools as well as school construction and related projects, postsecondary enrolment pressures, oil marketing and transportation costs, the start-up costs of the Alberta Energy Regulator, emergency response to forest fires and the mountain pine beetle, the Alberta Medical Association contract settlement and growth in physician services, volume and cost increases in drug benefit programs, programs for persons with developmental disabilities, and provincial highway preservation.

Now it is time to formalize the first part of that financial commitment, Madam Speaker. I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3

Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again this evening on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 3, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 3 focuses on the over-the-counter derivatives and the harmonization of derivatives regulation in Canada. These are complicated financial instruments, Madam Speaker, and as the

Minister of Finance mentioned at first reading, the lack of transparency around over-the-counter derivatives was widely seen as a contributing factor in the 2008 financial crisis. Following that crisis the International Organization of Securities Commissions introduced several new principles relating to the reduction of systemic risk, and the G-20 made recommendations to improve the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives markets. Canada along with the rest of the G-20 countries committed to strengthening the regulation of this type of investment. Bill 3 supports these international commitments made by Canada.

I'll get into some more detail about the bill in a minute, Madam Speaker, but first I think it would be instructive to say a few words about the nature of this type of investment. Derivatives generally take the form of bilateral contracts under which the parties agree to payments between them based on the value of the underlying asset or other data at a particular point in time. The main use of derivatives is to minimize risk for one party while offering the potential for high return at increased risk to another. The main types of derivatives are futures, forwards, options, and swaps. An over-the-counter derivative, which is the subject of Bill 3, is a derivative that is not listed or traded on an exchange.

So what does Bill 3 propose to do? Bill 3 creates a statutory framework for the regulation and oversight of over-the-counter derivatives, providing the Alberta Securities Commission with the authority to make rules dealing with derivatives. Under the framework proposed in Bill 3, over-the-counter derivatives would be traded through a derivatives exchange or electronic trading platform. Trades would be settled through central counterparties, and all derivatives transactions would have to be reported to a trade repository. There would also be solvency requirements. Together these measures serve to increase transparency in the derivatives market, helping to protect investors and reducing systemic risk.

The framework proposed in Bill 3 includes providing for new definitions of a derivative and classes of a derivative; enhancing or creating new definitions of important terms such as "recognized trade repository," "security," "trade," and "clearing agency"; recognizing trade repositories and adding references to them in the Securities Act where needed; expanding or clarifying powers of the Alberta Securities Commission relating to the regulation and oversight of derivatives; replacing references to exchange contracts and futures contracts with derivatives; repealing part 8 of the Securities Act, trading in exchange contracts, with requirements being moved into the rules; adding a new section, section 105.1, to provide that derivatives transactions are not void for noncompliance with Alberta securities laws, and this will harmonize Alberta with other jurisdictions like British Columbia and Ontario; amending section 147 to provide for a security of a reporting issuer to include a related derivative for purposes of insider trading obligations. Again, this amendment harmonizes with similar British Columbia and Ontario provisions.

Madam Speaker, the proposed amendments in Bill 3 will contribute to the harmonization of derivatives regulations across Canada. Provincial and territorial regulators are being encouraged to agree on a harmonized approach to regulating derivatives capable of being adopted across Canada, and this bill is certainly an important step in that direction.

We learned a lot from the 2008 financial crisis, Madam Speaker, and contributing to the reform of securities regulation is a priority for all jurisdictions, including Alberta. Bill 3 will support the ongoing collaborative work by provincial and territorial governments to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities laws. These changes proposed in Bill 3 will support Canada's international commitments, helping

to reduce risk and contributing to public confidence in the financial sector.

Madam Speaker, for the last three years the World Bank has ranked Canada as one of the top five countries for protecting investors, ahead of the United States and the United Kingdom. We want to build on that success, and that's why the government of Alberta and the Alberta Securities Commission are committed to continuous improvement of our securities regulatory system. The commission along with provincial securities regulators in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec have been active contributors to the development of regulatory reforms for over-the-counter derivatives markets at the local, national, and international levels.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 3. Of course, this is a reintroduction of I believe it was Bill 42 from last session. I spoke to it somewhat at length there in support, so I will be brief in my comments.

Unlike in any other industrialized country, jurisdiction over securities regulations in Canada is a provincial matter. This allows provinces to react as needed to special situations that arise in provincial capital markets, a very unique example of that being Alberta and our unique needs for raising capital in our energy sector and so forth.

7:40

Capital markets are international, of course, and provinces can't go to the international stage to negotiate common rules and regulations concerning investment, and in this case specifically they can't negotiate rules regarding derivatives. This means provinces have a responsibility to move quickly to implement these international standards when they are negotiated by our federal counterparts and work well for our provincial capital markets.

In 2009 leaders of the G-20 committed to a comprehensive reform agenda dealing with systemic risk in the international derivatives market. These commitments are being turned into regulations established collaboratively with all provincial securities regulators across the country through the Canadian Securities Administration.

Bill 3 will grant the authority to Alberta Securities Commission to implement these new CSA regulations when they are finalized. This is a good example of how the Canadian system of provincial jurisdiction over securities regulation can work in the international marketplace.

Bill 3 will allow the ASC to appoint trade repositories as well. This is a much-needed measure. With its passage over-the-counter derivatives will be reported to trade repositories, thereby eliminating systemic risk. No longer will corporations be able to hide their precarious financial positions created by secret over-the-counter derivative contracts as was one of the main problems and causes of the financial recession in 2008.

Bill 3 also updates woefully inadequate definitions regarding derivatives. The use of the term "exchange contract" does not deal with the complexity of modern-day derivatives. These updates to the definition of derivatives in the Securities Act are long past due and are needed in order to make sure we don't have a repeat of what occurred less than a decade before in this regard.

With that, as Finance critic for Wildrose I support that. We support this bill, as we did last session, and look forward to its quick passage. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Although this is a well-meaning bill, it does nothing to change what we didn't learn from the 2008 debacle. It's unfortunate because what's happened here is that the international markets are really left now to allow smaller jurisdictions – in this case Alberta is a small jurisdiction, B.C. is a small jurisdiction, and Canada stands alone in trying to regulate these over-the-counter derivatives. It can and possibly will put at a disadvantage some of our businesses who want to use derivatives as a risk management tool. What is absolutely needed here is an international agreement on how we're going to deal with these instruments, not just the regulations but how they're created.

If anyone has followed the derivatives from 2008, I think everyone is quite aware of what happened. It goes back to Enron. It goes back to Long-Term Capital. Barings Bank fell victim. There's a history and a litany of major corporate interests that have fallen victim to derivative failures. What we're trying to do is create a small microcosm of regulation dealing with over-the-counter derivatives, which I fear will take certain companies just outside our jurisdiction to enter into these deals.

There is a real problem with the idea of harmonizing regulations when there are no regulations, really, outside Canada in dealing with this. Wall Street has done a pretty good job of avoiding that. So there's a real dilemma on how we're going to handle derivatives and how it will affect our local economies, particularly the companies that have put themselves in a position to use derivatives as a risk management tool.

Again, if we look at our own budget here and our own investments in Alberta for this government, we use derivatives. Now, the presumption is that we use derivatives for risk management. Beyond that, looking into our own budget, there's no way to know what our exposure is, but it's reasonable to presume the exposure is manageable because we've not seen any harm and we've not seen any great increase in derivative profits. The only thing that is available to any auditor in dealing with derivatives is if they see great gains or losses where you're no longer using derivatives for risk management; you're using derivatives to basically gamble for high net worth gains. That's where these companies have run into tremendous problems.

So I don't know how we class these, and that's one of the other things. I realize that that's what the law says, but if anyone were to even look at their own mutual funds going back, say, a decade, anyone in here who invested in a mutual fund probably owned something called a PLUS note. That stood for peso-linked U.S. dollars. They were traded as triple-A bonds, but in reality they were derivatives based on the peso. That is going on continuously in the marketplace. How do we identify these things and deal with them on a regulatory basis?

I bring up the example of PLUS notes because they were created by Wall Street banks to deal with basically worthless bonds out of the Mexican central bank, but they were offshore-type accounts, and they were sold into our markets as triple-A bonds. That goes on. That goes on all the time when they repackage these derivatives and issue them to different classes of securities.

I think the bill is well intentioned. The idea of trying to harmonize regulations is probably well intentioned, but it's woefully short to think that we succeeded in actually being able to deal with these types of financial instruments because these are international transactions. People in this House, people in my

constituency don't really deal in derivatives. They may deal in exchange-traded derivatives, futures and the currency exchange and options. The real problem in derivatives is not the exchange derivative; it is the over-the-counter derivative, which is what we're trying to do.

I commend the government for doing its best, but there's a huge problem. And to think that we're solving the problem by passing legislation in Alberta, it's not touching it. What it is going to do, hopefully, is maybe set a standard, but in order to get a real hold on the risk that these instruments have caused in our financial industries, in our financial sector world-wide, we need our own federal government to step up and negotiate internationally how we're going to deal with this on a macro level because these are large banks and these are large industries which we have that are dealing with these. What I see here is that any one of our large companies that wants to deal in any of these OTC derivatives, what they're going to do is just step outside our jurisdiction because we don't then have the ability to regulate that. Most of these derivatives are not known to the public at all; they just are private agreements. So I'm not even sure how we audit these at that level.

Again, I haven't decided whether I'm going to support the bill or not. It's well intentioned, and I understand what it's trying to do, but I just don't see how it's going to get done unless we have a full international agreement on trying to regulate these. I absolutely agree with the government that there needs to be regulation. There needs to be regulation in dealing with this issue.

With that, thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. We have the five minutes for questions under 29(2)(a). Anyone interested in 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we'll move to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to speak to Bill 3, the bill before the floor that deals with derivatives and how they will be dealt with by the regulatory powers of the Alberta government. In my view this bill goes some measure to allowing for some clarity to take place with a financial instrument that, in my view and, in fact, in many people's view, was largely responsible for the '08 financial meltdown. I call it a financial meltdown. I know some people call it a correction or things of that nature. I look at it as almost an entire failure of the financial system. It was brought down as a result of corporate greed and, actually, a lack of regulation. We didn't quite have an understanding at that time of what derivatives were.

7:50

I think that if we even go back a little bit further, you know, no one really can quite pinpoint a genesis as to when the derivatives market started. Of course, Republicans will go back and blame Jimmy Carter for starting something on a housing front that apparently led to this stuff. Of course, Democrats will go down and point to something that Bush and Cheney did. Some Republicans will go back and find some things that Clinton did. So it's a he-said-she-said game of who started the derivatives or allowed derivatives to get a foothold in the marketplace.

Largely, what I think we have to look at as a result of what transpired is the fact that there needs to be some government regulation in our financial matters. I know we always like to say

that, you know, we don't need regulations or the red tape, which is the euphemism for these type of rules, but at the end of the day you've got to remember that one person's red tape is another person's financial protection. We have to come to an appropriate balance in this regard. In fact, I think that if one thing – I always kind of giggle about this. There was a big push here in this country probably in the years 2001 to 2008 where many forces largely on the federal Conservatives side wished us to loosen our banking rules to emulate, be more like the United States. By "like the United States," I mean allow for banks to be both trading arms on the stock markets while also savings investment vehicles for the Joe and Jane Citizen that they were providing banking services for. The United States allowed for a merger of those two institutions, that allowed, then, for a great deal of leveraging to occur throughout that banking system, largely through derivatives.

On this side of the 49th parallel, despite the pressures put on by many of the Conservative ilk here in this country, Prime Minister Chrétien actually wisely said that, no, we're not going to go down this foolhardy path and said that we're going to keep our banks separate, that the banks are going to do the one thing that they've traditionally done, and we'll allow our trading floors to do what they've traditionally done, and thank you very much, but we're not going to get caught up in this folly. Largely, you know, that proved to be wise. Now when you have people saying that our banking rules stood the test of time over the course of that period, it's because we resisted the urge to follow the folly that was going on in the United States. We largely have Prime Minister Chrétien and Finance Minister Martin to thank as a result of that.

In any event, just sort of leaving that as it may, I think the government of the day is doing the best they can to enforce some rules and regulations around financial derivatives. I'm not an expert. I believe that this is probably the best we can do right now. Following along with international protocol as it emerges and setting down those rules and regulations here in Alberta, I believe, is a wise course of action.

In any event, thank you very much for allowing me to make those comments. We can now call the question here on this Bill 3.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 3, Securities Amendment Act, 2014?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations can close debate.

Mr. Dallas: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 4 Estate Administration Act

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

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act.

This bill was designed to modernize and simplify the process of administering estates. Bill 4 moves the process of obtaining a grant for the estate of a living minor to the Minors' Property Act. While current legislation applied generally to the estates of deceased persons, there were also provisions for getting grants to deal with the property of living minors. These more properly belong in the Minors' Property Act, and as such, they have been moved to that act.

The new bill also provides a new jurisdiction in the Alberta courts to allow the court to issue a grant, a legal document giving you the authority to administer an estate if the court thinks a grant is necessary. This may be used where there is a legal action in Alberta involving a deceased plaintiff which the personal representative needs to discontinue and the deceased person did not leave any property in Alberta or did not reside in Alberta. This means that a personal representative may ask the court to give them a grant providing the authority to discontinue legal action in Alberta, where the deceased was involved as a plaintiff, so that there are no lingering potential liabilities that could affect the administration of the estate.

Bill 4 clearly sets out the role of a personal representative who is administering an estate. Currently the roles and responsibilities of a personal representative are set out in common law rather than being codified in a statute. Common law holds that a personal representative is a fiduciary. They must put the interests of the deceased person above their own. They must perform their role honestly and in good faith in accordance with the deceased person's intentions and with the will and with the care and diligence and skill of a person of ordinary prudence. The personal representative must also distribute the estate as soon as practicable. This encourages estates to be resolved in a timely manner.

Bill 4 also directs the personal representative and others to the Funeral Services Act and the Cemeteries Act, which applies to determine who has the authority to control and give instructions for the funeral and making funeral arrangements. While the role of the personal representative is clear to estate administration professionals, it is not easily understood by laypersons who may accept the position of personal representative. The Estate Administration Act will rectify this situation and clearly state the roles and responsibilities of a personal representative. The act will also include a higher skill requirement for professional personal representatives who administer an estate as their professional occupation or business.

The act sets out the responsibilities of personal representatives by codifying four core tasks of a person administering an estate. These core tasks are: identify estate assets and liabilities, administer and manage the estate, satisfy debts and obligations, and distribute and account for the estate. Examples of the core tasks are more fully explained in a schedule included in the act. For instance, administering and managing an estate may include such things as creating and maintaining records as well as regularly communicating with beneficiaries concerning the administration and management of the estate. Satisfying debts and obligations may include determining the income tax or other tax liabilities of the deceased as well as advertising for creditors.

Another area that the Estate Administration Act, Bill 4, seeks to clarify and improve is when estates are administered without a grant of the court. The new act recognizes that a personal representative named by a deceased person in a will may choose to administer an estate without obtaining a grant from the court. The new act ensures that when this occurs, these personal representatives named in the will are subject to all the same roles and responsibilities as those that apply when a grant is issued. For example, the same notice provisions applying to a personal representative acting with a grant will apply to a personal representative acting without a grant, including the requirement to provide notices to beneficiaries, family members who may have a claim against the estate, a spouse, the Public Trustee when a minor is affected, and so on.

Additionally, Bill 4 provides that if a personal representative refuses or fails to perform a duty or core task or to provide notice,

a person can bring an application to the court to obtain an order to require the personal representative to comply with their duties or even have the personal representative removed.

8:00

Bill 4 also will update the rules governing the authority of the personal representative in regard to the property included in the estate. Rather than listing all of the powers of the personal representative, the new act indicates that the personal representative stands in the shoes of the deceased person. The personal representative can do anything the deceased person could do with their property subject to the will and any other legislation restricting them. This means that instead of listing all the powers of the personal representative such as the power to sell, lease, divide, or otherwise deal with property and trying to make sure nothing is missed in the legislation, the deceased person in their will, if their will needs it, can list only circumstances where they do not want the personal representative to have certain powers in relation to certain property. This ensures that the personal representative has all the power they need to help them administer the estate efficiently in respect of the wishes of the deceased.

One final area of estate law this bill will modernize is marshalling rules. This act reforms archaic common-law rules that set out how the gifts are distributed to the beneficiaries if the estate does not have enough money to pay all the debts and to distribute all the gifts. These rules do not affect what assets the personal representative uses to pay the debts or liabilities of the estate. They also do not affect creditors. However, the results of these rules mean some beneficiaries will lose their entire gifts while others will still receive their entire gifts. The new act requires that all the assets in the estate must contribute proportionately to the payment of the debts and liabilities of the estate. This means all the beneficiaries will contribute to the payment of debts and liabilities, and it makes the final distribution of the estate to the beneficiaries fairer.

Madam Speaker, all of the changes I have described are essentially to improve estate administration laws. Albertans will benefit from clear laws, and those planning their estates can rest easier knowing their wishes will be carried out. For those of us who have asked our children to be named as personal representatives, I think they will all breathe a little easier. We owe it to Albertans to continue the work we have done to make sure that those who are administering their estates have a clear view of the obligations of those who have passed on.

Madam Speaker, I move adjournment of debate on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1 Savings Management Act

[Adjourned debate March 5: Mr. Hehr]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has 10 minutes left in his presentation. You're okay?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah.

The Acting Speaker: All right.

The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In 17 years in public life and serving in this House, I've been able to say that I've been able to come to work with passion each day. I've looked forward to the work that we do. I've had the privilege of serving in seven portfolios during that period of time, and I can say that I've come

to work with passion and excitement every day because what we do on a day-to-day basis is important not for today but for tomorrow.

As I look at Bill 1 this year, I can say that never have I been more excited about how we're building tomorrow in this province. We've been blessed in this province with natural resources. [interjections] I know it's difficult to understand that the Savings Management Act would be a bill that excites me, but it is, Madam Speaker. This province has been blessed with natural resources, and it's been blessed with good government so that we've been able to turn those natural resources into a province that is the best place to live, work, and raise a family in the world.

It's not just me saying that. People from all over the world are coming to Alberta to establish their homes, to build their families, and that's the way this province has been built over generations. My grandparents came to Alberta to create a new future, and as we work in this Legislature and in this government, that's really what it's about. It's about creating the future. It's about preparing so that our children and our grandchildren can have that opportunity to live and work in Alberta and trade out into the world.

About 10 years ago I had the privilege of leading a process of developing a 20-year strategic plan with government. That 20-year strategic plan talked about unleashing innovation, leading and learning, competing in a global marketplace so that we could have the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Many of the things that we talked about in that strategic plan are things that are happening today, things that are helping to move forward so that our children and grandchildren can have that life.

So why am I so excited about a bill called the Savings Management Act? Well, we do have those natural resources, Madam Speaker. We do have the asset in the ground, and we do harvest that asset, turn it into cash, and as we do that, we have an obligation. Those assets don't just belong to current-day Albertans. They didn't belong to yesterday's Albertans. They belong to the Albertans of tomorrow, and we have an obligation to save at least some of those assets for those future generations.

That's what the savings plan that this government has put in place does, and that's what the Savings Management Act is about. It's about saving with purpose for tomorrow, and that saving with purpose is extremely important. As we put those assets away, we need to use them to build multigenerational assets, schools and roads, that will serve not only today's Albertans but tomorrow's Albertans and the Albertans after that, building those multigenerational assets that help Albertans build the capacity they need for that future that we're talking about, but also to save, to put some assets in the bank, not just to hoard them away but to put them in the bank in a way in which they will actually create new opportunities for the future. That's what endowment funds do.

Madam Speaker, we have had good leadership in this, starting from the very early years of the Progressive Conservative government in this province. The Alberta heritage savings medical research fund is now about 30 years old, and it has established a baseline in this province in the biosciences and the life sciences which really gives us a foundation for the future. It's developed new knowledge. It's created knowledge which not only is utilized in this province but shared with the world. That's important, and I'll come back to that.

Some years ago we established the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, which most people know by the name Alberta ingenuity fund, again establishing an endowment which will help drive dollars out that can be used for research and innovation; which help to create the new economy,

the next economy; which help build on our assets, whether they're oil and gas assets or whether they're products of our agricultural industry or whether they're forestry products; which help us build on those assets and turn them into products that we can share with the world; and which help create the type of economy, a knowledge-based economy, so that our children can live and work in Alberta and trade out into that world.

We have that heritage of the heritage medical research fund and the Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research. A third endowment was established, Madam Speaker, and that was the heritage scholarship fund, a heritage scholarship fund which has turned out millions of dollars over the years to help Albertans get the education that they need to maximize their potential so that they can contribute back to Alberta in a very meaningful way, in their best possible way. This is the history that we have with this government and this province of putting money away but putting money away with purpose, to help build that knowledge base for the future.

I come to the Savings Management Act, Bill 1 this year, our Premier's Bill 1 in this session. What it does is truly exciting. We've had the heritage medical research fund, we've had the heritage scholarship fund, we've had the Alberta ingenuity fund, and now we have a social innovation fund. Why is that important, Madam Speaker? Well, it's important because if we want the quality of life for our children and grandchildren in this province that we've enjoyed and if we want all Albertans to be able to share in that quality of life, we have to deal with those really perplexing issues, the social issues in our community. Whether you come to those issues from a sense of social justice or whether you come to those issues from a sense of enlightened self-interest, it is the cost of social failure which really drags down a society. It's the cost of social failure, that's feeding the ongoing cost of not being able to deal with social justice issues, that really draws against the productivity of our society and the quality of life of our community.

8:10

We have those issues. Last fall in this province we had a world-leading conference on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, in fact two conferences, one on the legal side and one on the operational and research side, leading-edge conferences on how to deal with one of the emerging issues of our day, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, something that's entirely preventable. There's a lot of research on it, yet we don't know how to embed that research into practice so that we can do away with an issue that causes so much of a problem for so many people in society.

We want to eliminate poverty, yet we know that we can't just buy our way out of poverty, that we actually have to find a way to embrace all elements of our society and all people in our society, equip them with the tools that they need to be successful in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Not an easy task.

The social innovation endowment fund, with a billion dollars in it, has \$45 million a year going out to create new knowledge, going out to help translate that knowledge into action in innovative ways, going out there to help finance new and different ways of doing things in the social agenda. There couldn't be a more important task for us at this point in Alberta's history, a time in Alberta's history when so many of us have so much, when so many of us have the ability to get good jobs, get a good education, take advantage of all of the opportunities that are Alberta, yet so many Albertans don't have that.

How do we bridge that gap? That gap between those that have and those who have not in this type of a society will get wider unless we invest in social innovation and understand how to deal

with those particular issues. That's what Bill 1 is about, Madam Speaker. It's about a social innovation fund which tackles some of the most perplexing and problematic issues of our society today. That is foresight. That's about building the future.

We also in Bill 1, of course, have the agriculture and food innovation endowment, which will also assist us. One of our traditional economies in this province is the food economy, agriculture. It's been a staple of this province for many, many years, and it will be for many years to come. There's one thing that I can assure you, that with all the change in this world, we will always need food. [interjection] Don't look at me like that when I say it.

Madam Speaker, the agriculture and food innovation fund understands that in order to compete in the world marketplace with agricultural products, we can't just rely on what we've always done before. We're going to have to be innovative. We're going to have to find new products. We're going to have to find new ways of raising our products and processing our products. We need to be able to cut the cost curve so that we can take the world price and pay world input costs and still be able to have a successful economy. The agriculture and food innovation endowment fund will help us to do that.

Even more exciting, the Alberta heritage scholarship fund is being topped up by an additional \$200 million so that we can put more of a focus on helping those Albertans who want to be in the trades and technologies, who want to get those good jobs that are available to us today and turn them into careers and lifetime opportunities so that they can support their families. To have the \$200 million there will give us \$9 million more a year, not just for scholarships and bursaries but to partner with business, to close the gaps, to find the ways to encourage more people to consider the trades and technologies as a career. That's what that one is about.

Then the Alberta future fund. Recognizing that the original purpose of the heritage trust fund was not simply to sit there, that it was actually to help build Alberta in exciting ways, the Alberta future fund will create some capacity to do that. So we have the rainy-day fund – we have that savings account – but we also have endowment funds which help to build and create knowledge for the future and translate it into action, and we have the Alberta future fund, which can be utilized to do those big things that you can't budget for on a year-to-year basis, those exciting opportunities that come along once in a generation.

Madam Speaker, I know that you can tell how excited I am about the opportunity that we have today, the opportunity that we have today because of good government and good management. We can build the infrastructure that we need for tomorrow so that the people in Alberta can have the capacities, have the abilities, have the education that they need for tomorrow, so that we can invest our assets in such ways that they will work for tomorrow to build the knowledge that we need for tomorrow.

One other piece I want to add to that, Madam Speaker, because people often talk about how big the heritage savings fund should be, how big the savings account should be. Lots of times they point to other jurisdictions in the world and talk about how big their savings accounts have grown. One of the challenges is that Alberta is a subnational government, and you can't actually build a savings account to the huge level that some people talk about without in some ways creating discombobulation within Confederation itself.

So what do you do? What you do is create knowledge, invest in such a way that you're creating knowledge that shares with the rest of the country, that shares with the rest of the world. It's not just hoarding our assets for ourselves, for Albertans today and in

the future; it's a way of saving those assets for future Albertans yet sharing the knowledge that's created from those assets and the translation of that knowledge into action, sharing that with the world. That, Madam Speaker, is why I'm excited today to be a part of this government. That's why I'm excited about coming to work every day with this government, to work with this Premier, my colleagues in government.

Mr. Anderson: This Premier?

Mr. Hancock: This Premier, who has a vision for the future of this province, a vision which understands that what we do today is about creating tomorrow for our children, for our grandchildren, a tomorrow where they can live in an Alberta where they are equipped with the knowledge, skills, education, because of the work that our Education minister is doing today in terms of making sure that our children are equipped with 21st century skills and the ability to solve problems, and trade out into the world, Madam Speaker.

Bill 1 today is building on a platform that has helped equip this province to get us where we are today, creating that platform which will take Alberta well into the future and ensure that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the quality of life that we have and the economy that we have, even though that economy may move beyond traditional agriculture, forestry, oil and gas and into new and different knowledge-based products. That's what we're creating today with Bill 1, Madam Speaker, and that's why I'm very proud to support it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 1? The hon. Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to stand and speak to this piece of legislation, something that I'm extremely passionate about. I would like to share with the hon. members of this Assembly some of the background that I have with this particular piece of legislation.

I want to take us back to the Fifth Session of the 27th Legislature. That was the session just before the election in 2012. I had two motions on the Order Paper at that time, Madam Speaker. The first motion that I want to talk about was Motion 519, and it read: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to undertake a review and public consultation regarding the purpose and scope of both the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the sustainability fund, including the mandatory allocation of nonrenewable resource revenue to these funds.

Well, Madam Speaker, it was shortly after the election that the Premier appointed me associate minister of Finance, with one of my mandates being the consultation around a savings policy for this province. And I can tell you that I'm very proud to have brought forward, with the hon. Finance minister, the Fiscal Management Act last spring, which set out exactly that, a mandatory savings policy when it came to the nonrenewable resource revenue. We have debated and passed that piece of legislation in this House, and I think it stands for itself. The government will be, for the first time in a long time, putting aside nonrenewable resource revenue into our savings account, and that's something I can be very proud of.

The second part of that motion talked about what the purpose is for this savings account. I recently, on budget day, did a tele town hall in my constituency. As part of that I did a poll that asked what the government should be using its savings for, and I gave people

three options. Twenty-three per cent of them said that the savings should be strictly for the replacement of nonrenewable resource revenue when it runs out; 15 per cent said that it should be a cushion for short-term revenue fluctuations; 28 per cent said that it should be used to invest in Albertans' quality of life today and in the future; another 28 per cent said all of the above; and 8 per cent said don't save at all.

8:20

So I know when I speak in favour of this piece of legislation that I'm speaking on behalf of a significant majority of my constituents because, essentially, what this piece of legislation does is that it allows us to invest strategically in our future as a province. It does allow us to put some money away for the eventual depletion of nonrenewable resource revenue. As well, our savings policy does help cushion the blow, through the contingency account, of short-term revenue fluctuations. So I know that the government's savings policy does reflect the values in my constituency, Madam Speaker.

I do want to take you to the second motion I had on that Order Paper, and that motion back in 2012 was: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to undertake a review of current social entrepreneurship in Alberta and develop a platform that will encourage collaboration within and among the public, private, and nonprofit sectors relating to social enterprise and the delivery of social and community programming.

Again, Madam Speaker, this is something that I have been very passionate about for a long, long time in my role in public service. Obviously, as many members know, I was a school board trustee for the Calgary board of education for three years, and it was very interesting. There was something that became very clear to me. I started to see the emergence of the three sectors we have in this society: the private sector, the not-for-profit sector, and the public sector. In many instances a lot of the trends that were happening in those sectors were responses to problems that the other sectors were typically good at dealing with, and I think this has provided us with a huge opportunity here in this province and around the world to look at things differently and to step outside the box, and this is why I support this particular legislation. I am very much a supporter of the social innovation endowment fund because I believe it provides us with the opportunity to do so.

Madam Speaker, I could say, in all honesty, that this is why I stand in this Legislature today. This is what motivates me as a person that wants to get involved in public service, because I know the challenge. One of the main functions of government is to allocate a finite amount of resources, and it's a challenge, and we all deal with those challenges, trying to find the priorities when there are so many of them, to determine what gets the public funding and what doesn't. You know, I always got very frustrated in public discourse around the debate as to how we're allocating resources: if only we had more funding for this, and if only we had more funding for that. The debate around public policy seemed to devolve into a debate simply about whether we had the sufficient amount of funding in something or not.

One of the hon. Deputy Premier's most famous sayings that I love is that there are some people in this world who believe that to solve all of our issues we just need to add more money and stir. I simply do not believe in that, Madam Speaker. I think this world is changing so much that some of the systems, some of the programs, some of the ways that we do things today just simply do not sufficiently deal with the societal problems that we have, no matter how much money you want to put into the system.

One of the motivating factors for me standing here today is not – I didn't come here to put more money into this or put more

money into that. I came here today, or got myself into public life, because I honestly and sincerely believe that if we put our heads together, we can come up with systems, come up with ideas that actually meet today's needs instead of just trying to fund at a greater level a system that met yesterday's needs. That is something that I'm very, very passionate about.

In fact, there was an article written in the paper just days before the last provincial election by Nick Gafuik, who at the time was involved with the Manning institute. In that article in the *Calgary Herald* on March 25, he quoted Preston Manning, when talking about social entrepreneurship and social innovation, as saying:

When should government facilitate, enable and partner with other stakeholders to achieve public goals? How can government facilitate without creating unhealthy dependencies or bureaucratic intrusions into the non-governmental sectors?

The article goes on to make some suggestions such as, you know, that the government needs to – they talk a little bit about my motion, some of the stuff that is happening in the federal government in this area.

Then it goes on and says that the government should create appropriate legal structures for social enterprises that combine social objectives with business discipline: There are increasing numbers of social enterprises in Canada. These are ventures that have a social mission and might generate revenue or even modest profit through their operations.

It continues to go on to say for the government to develop alternative funding mechanisms for social enterprises: To encourage creative thinking about social problems.

It says:

Imagine a prize for the group able to increase the success rates of addiction treatment programs or decrease recidivism.

Madam Speaker, this is what social innovation is about. I just want to provide what the definition of social innovation is. This is from the Centre for Social Innovation based out of Ontario. It defines social innovation as:

new ideas that resolve existing social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges for the benefit of people and planet. A true social innovation is systems-changing – it permanently alters the perceptions, behaviours and structures that previously gave rise to these challenges.

Again, this is something that I know has driven me in my pursuit in public life, and this is why I was so happy to see Bill 1 and why I think all members should support this particular bill.

In fact, it was in 2010 when the idea of social innovation really started to become a little bit well known, when David Cameron and the U.K. Conservative Party put forward in its manifesto the idea or the concept of a big society. This is really what the roots of social innovation are. It's to empower people, empower communities to come up with the solutions, that beg us to come up with solutions in our communities for the social problems, the challenges, those types of things. It was premised on five principles: to give communities more powers, so localism and devolution; to encourage people to take an active role in their communities; to transfer power from central to local government; to support co-ops, mutuals, charities, and social enterprises; and to publish government data.

This is the whole concept – again, at the very heart of it is something that I strongly believe in – to start to develop programming that is based at the local level. It's developed by the local level, delivered at the local level and not delivered by some uniform government bureaucracy that doesn't react very well, reacts with very limited flexibility to the unique needs of many of our citizens and the unique complexities of many of the social problems.

Madam Speaker, I just want to talk briefly about what social innovation is not, and I've heard a little bit of it. Social innovation is not a panacea for all of our social ills. Let's be clear. No one has ever said that social innovation is going to solve everything that comes before us, but it is an opportunity to explore. I believe it said in the throne speech, as was delivered by the hon. Lieutenant Governor, that it is a way to take today's ideas and try to find tomorrow's solutions. That's what this is really about.

It's also not to replace existing funding or to shirk government responsibilities. In fact, this fund and this funding is to provide incremental funding as well as leverage other resources out there in the community. As well, this is not a revolutionary approach to government. This is an evolutionary approach through introducing best practices and programs to the public sector. If we find certain programs work better than others, those programs will naturally rise to the top, and those best practices and those programs will be able to then start to replace what we do in government in the public sector.

I do want to talk briefly about why I'm so passionate about this, Madam Speaker. Why I'm so passionate about it is that I've had a number of conversations over the last number of years with Albertans, in fact, many of them with my constituents, and I want to highlight them for a minute. For example, I introduced just before the last election Tammy Maloney, who is a constituent of mine. Just to read a little bit about her:

After 20 years in the private sector managing businesses and facilitating change management as a liaison between departments in the oil and gas industry, Tammy left Canada to obtain a Master's degree in Business Administration . . . with a focus in Social Entrepreneurship from the IESE Business School in Spain.

In 2010 she launched the SEA Change company in Calgary, which is focused on social entrepreneurship.

8:30

After pouring her passion and heart into the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, trying to determine which one should take the lead, Tammy has come to the conclusion that it's none of them. To end the divisive and bifurcated nature of our society and systems, she believes that we need to leverage the principles of social entrepreneurship to unite the sectors toward a shared vision of creating prosperity for all people. Again, this an Albertan that is very passionate about this and is very excited about this opportunity that is presenting itself with this social entrepreneur fund.

When I introduced her, I also introduced her with a client of hers, Izabela. Izabela is a young lady that receives AISH payments. She has worked with Izabela, who has had a very difficult time keeping down any sort of traditional employment but has got a very creative mind. She's worked with Izabela to develop a company that does greeting cards, Madam Speaker. She sells these greeting cards, and this is an opportunity for her to contribute to society, feel a part of society, and start to bring in revenue. This is an opportunity for her to do that.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about Bill Locke, who is also a constituent of mine, who founded the Capacity Builders in 1999 after leading community organizations. He is a part of a project called Food n More that brings together over 25 social agencies and community groups in the food industry and all levels of government to address the problem of starvation in our community.

Again, you know, I can go through a number of people. I know I'm running out of time. I've had a number of conversations with Drew Brown, who is a former constituent of mine, who has a not-

for-profit organization called Hope for Everyone that works in the homeless sector. All of these people are very excited about the opportunity to have access to a fund that allows them to use their expertise and knowledge of the community and the social challenges that exist in our community.

I just want to mention one last thing, Madam Speaker, and that is . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have 29(2)(a). Anybody for 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was listening intently. I think the hon. member was cut off mid-sentence. I for one would like to hear the end of it. That was a passionate and important speech.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you. I did want to mention two more things. One is that I was reading a 2012 interview done by the CBC with Brett Wilson, who said that people that are opposed to these types of ideas – this is what he said about those people.

Until the ideas are put on the table and we start to talk about them, I think it's premature for any of the parties to start bellyaching about whether this is good for the country or not.

He is talking about social innovation in our country. He said:

There's no offloading intended — in fact as I saw it, there's actually an opportunity for government to save money if these programs are effective. What they are saying is we believe the entrepreneurial spirit of our country might be part of the solution. Bring us your money, bring us your ideas, we'll reward you.

I believe that's exactly what this does.

I just want to finish off by saying that there are a number of concepts that social innovation encompasses, and I don't think we should jump to conclusions as to what those might be. There is lots of talk about social impact bonds or social finance, which is a form of trying to find private money that invests in a particular program with some sort of return on investment if the appropriate mechanisms or the appropriate outcomes are achieved. That's a very complex legal agreement and would require the government to book a contingent liability on its balance sheet as part of that agreement.

There is social entrepreneurship, that really looks at addressing the ability of not-for-profit organizations to build some sort of revenue into their business model.

There are public-private partnerships, Madam Speaker, looking at ways that the private sector and the public sector can partner to deliver some sort of public infrastructure or public service.

There are also public-public partnerships, where you bring a number of public entities or government departments together to work on projects in a collaborative way that provides a greater good than if they would have done it separately through their own funding mechanisms.

That just brings me to my final point, and it's a point that I was — just about three weeks ago I attended the Calgary nonprofit innovation awards, which was awarded by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. Attainable Homes Calgary actually won one of the awards. As their CEO was speaking, there was something that wasn't lost on me, Madam Speaker, and that was that the CEO, David Watson, said that his advice to nonprofit organizations across this province is to make lots of mistakes; just don't make the same ones twice.

I think it's very important. We have an entrepreneurial and innovative spirit in this province. There's no reason why this shouldn't exist in the social sector as well. That's really what this

is about. It's about investing, as the hon. Lieutenant Governor said, in today's ideas to find tomorrow's solutions. We need to support this because of that. We need to support our social sector in making sure that they have the opportunity to make mistakes so that we can be innovative and that we don't make those mistakes in the future and we can move on and show progress on many of the societal challenges that we face today.

That's why I'm here, Madam Speaker, and I'm sure that's why every member in this Assembly is here. That's why I think we should all support this particular bill.

The Acting Speaker: We still have a minute left for 29(2)(a). The Member for Calgary-Buffalo on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. member for his comments, and I appreciate the passion, and you've obviously done a great deal of research on this.

The thing is that I've come to the perspective that while I think this is well-intentioned, I don't know how successful it's going to be. I will say this because I think, really, the largest problem out there for the vast majority of people that are using social agencies or the like is simply a lack of financial resources. That's why these nonprofit groups exist.

You solve that problem of having enough money, you're largely not going to need a nonprofit, so I think there are simpler ways to get rid of a whole bunch of nonprofits out there, simplify the system, and go from there.

I realize this would be through a federal structure, guaranteed annual income... [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired] But I missed that discussion opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that wish to speak on Bill 1, Savings Management Act? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great honour to stand and speak to Bill 1. There's going to be a bit of a recurring theme as far as my position on it, but first and foremost I think the question begs to be asked: why can't the government just fund these ministries and programs in the first place so that they don't have to rely on additional endowment funds and layers of bureaucracy of having funding coming from many different sources?

I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo also asked a great question, which is: if we look at addressing the needs or the root causes of what these many nonprofits are trying to do and solve those problems, we will eliminate the need for these nonprofit organizations. Let's keep in mind that these are the organizations that are grassroots, that are in the community, that are carrying out incredible work, that many and most are funded publicly, which they should be. That's the recurring theme for myself, Madam Speaker, as far as Bill 1.

To put it bluntly, I think, essentially, Bill 1 is an admission of failure on the part of the government to budget and maintain operations adequately, so they're looking to the private sector to fund what the government should be funding.

When we look at where this is coming from, the heritage fund, it should be a treasured legacy that was given to us from Peter Lougheed and used for the betterment of all Albertans. It should not be used as a cover-up for the government's failing to deliver

proper educational and social services, which is essentially what this bill is alluding to. So if the government intends to encourage innovation of the delivery of social and educational services, they should ensure that there is adequate funding to the ministries to do so instead of slashing those budgets and then coming up with a way for the private industry to fund what should be publicly funded and publicly delivered.

8:40

Just a quick recap for members who may have a short memory. In the 2013 budget this PC government cut funding to valuable human services and educational programming by hundreds of millions of dollars: \$39 million dollars, or 42 per cent, to PDD was cut in community access supports; income support was cut by \$43 million, or 10 per cent; the STEP program was eliminated by 7.4 per cent. There was an initial cut of \$147 million to advanced education. When the hon. member across the way talks about innovating our postsecondary institutions, well, here's an idea. Maybe just fund them adequately, and you won't have to rely on the private sector to come up with these innovations, which I'll speak to in a few minutes.

So instead of this PC government transferring the money, that belongs to all Albertans, from the heritage trust fund into these new accounts with as of yet no regulation as to whom or how it's going to be spent – you know, how do we even know that the money that they're talking about is going to be used? Again, we haven't gotten a direct answer. We still don't know. Even within this bill there are many questions and very few answers.

One of my grave concerns is around the area of social impact bonds. Now, this bill tiptoes around that subject and doesn't come right out with it, but when I asked questions in the House last week, it was pretty clear from the answers that I received that the government is plowing full steam ahead in the area of social impact bonds. Let's keep in mind, Madam Speaker, that social impact bonds are profit-driven, similar to a P3 model of development or government-funded business deals. This bill is not about service delivery. It's not about philanthropy or meeting the needs of Albertans. It's about privatizing our social services and allowing the private industry to have access to and profit from the services that are already being delivered. There's been quite a bit of outcry in the not-for-profit community, from the Parkland Institute and Public Interest Alberta, as far as why this is a framework for privatization by stealth.

In this bill it's suggesting that we need the private sector to tell us what innovation means for social services. You know, I need to remind the associate minister and all members on the other side that there already is an incredible amount of innovation in the not-for-profit sector as far as how to deliver services and programs to meet the needs of Albertans today and tomorrow. Their biggest outcry is the fact that every year their budgets are getting cut. They have to lose staff, they have to cut programming, and they have to cut supports, which has a negative impact on the lives of those individuals and, one could argue, society and all of us, who are going to pay for those cuts now and in the future.

The truth about these social impact bonds is that they're actually just going after the low-hanging fruit. They don't really offer any innovation, first and foremost, because investors hate risk. Investors want to minimize their risk as much as possible, so they're going to invest in projects where risk is removed – okay? – where they're guaranteed a payout or at least they're guaranteed that the government or the not-for-profit will cover their investment if there is a loss or if there is a loss of profit or the endeavour turns out to not generate a profit.

A great example of this is the city of New York social impact bond. Goldman Sachs is the investor, and they're backed by the charities. If the charities don't actually meet the targets that are laid out in the contract, Goldman Sachs still gets paid regardless, and it's the charity that's going to have to put in the money. I really don't see how adding this other layer is improving or adding innovation or even benefiting.

Innovative solutions like that idea, you know, are not the issue. There have been straightforward ideas as far as innovating that have come from publicly funded services, public university research. Again, the ideas that the minister thinks are going to come out are not innovative, and they don't require the public sector to profit off them.

I mean, again, that's the big issue here. The bottom line in the private sector for businesses – what is their purpose? What is their goal for existence? It's to earn a profit. So when you add the profit motive to not-for-profit or social services, that should not be delivered with the mindset of: we're making a buck first, and then we're going to try to deliver some kind of service. It should be done through long-term, committed government investment, something that this government refuses to provide.

Let's keep in mind that most of the not-for-profit funding from the government comes in the form of grants. I've spoken about this in the House on numerous occasions. The problems with grants, first of all, is that they're short term. They require a huge amount of research, of human capital navigating through and filling out applications. You've also got a competition between not-for-profits for those dollars because there's a limited pool of dollars. Then, worse, on top of that is the fact that grants are often applied for, and not-for-profits don't know until months and months later. I've talked to many of them where they're trying to budget for the year, when they don't find out if they even have the operational grant for months down the road. You have a real instability. You're basically handcuffing organizations from doing their job, from having proper budgeting and planning when you rely on grants.

Again, the Alberta NDP are calling for long-term, stable, predictable funding. That'll actually be my theme when I respond a little later this evening to the Speech from the Throne. That applies to school boards, education, municipalities. That applies to all different sectors, Madam Speaker.

Beyond the issue of delivering or not delivering innovation or innovative solutions, there are other issues that I have. Basically, through the social impact bonds we're forcing nonprofit program delivery organizations to take on a great deal of administrative and transactional costs. Again, I've talked about the short-term grants which make it challenging. There are several other layers of bureaucracy and middle management that are going to overburden these already overburdened organizations. They must go out and act like salespeople and investment bankers in order to attract investments. They must hire legal counsel, financial advisers to assist them with their bonds.

Again, there are examples that I'm going to speak to, and I'm actually quite happy that the associate minister referenced the first social impact bond and how much of a failure that's been. Clearly, government just looked at the fact that another jurisdiction did this but didn't follow through with the impact that it has had on the not-for-profit community. You know, the sum of this argument, anyway, is that it puts agencies in the indefensible position of having to serve the interests of the investors over those of the clients that they're trying to help or the long-term goals of finding true systemic solutions to social problems as opposed to Band-Aid solutions, that this system of social impact bonds will very likely create and, at best, serve.

The other point to consider is that this government is already having troubles finding companies that are willing to bid on P3s. We've seen the fact, as I've learned with the Edmonton public schools that were promised recently and the announcement that they're all going to be built in-house. Part of the issue is the lack of tenders, which tells us that, again, the private industry is saying: "No. We can't find a way to profit off it. Why do we want to invest in it?" And they shouldn't. Our schools should be publicly funded, publicly delivered. We shouldn't be tendering out contracts to the private sector. I mean, I would argue that for our child care, for our seniors' care, for our home care.

Governments are better placed to deliver programs in cost-efficient ways since they have economies of scale and they have the ability to fund interconnected programs and address systemic issues. Again, I think that every member in this House will recognize that, you know, an issue like poverty has many different facets to it, that there are many different layers, so there isn't just a one-shot silver bullet to resolve it. It does require co-operation and working between agencies, which, I would argue, Madam Speaker, is already happening. Again, our not-for-profits and NGOs are doing a phenomenal job trying to pick up the pieces of a broken system that, I would argue, this government has created and continues to underfund.

8:50

Talking briefly about the fact that they're ineffective, they're more costly, and they're also morally wrong, we look at the issue of the fact that the government's failure to solve defined social programs is turning into an investment opportunity that promises profit rewards to successfully innovative investors. There have been numerous concerns from the Alberta College of Social Workers and many others. Part of their message is that they don't feel that people should be profiting off the misery of others.

The example that the hon. minister gave was regarding the first social impact bond, that was brought in in 2010. Basically, it's brought in after intermediaries scanned jails for the most likely to be successful clients, and then took only volunteers into the program, provided support to prisoners and their families before and after release. If it was successful, then they would see, versus a control group, a very profitable rate of return. However, the general secretary of Unison had stated, as the Alberta NDP have brought forward in this House already, that the plan is about saving money, but it's actually going to cost more jobs and lead to more service cuts, which will cost Albertans more in the long term. Again, you know, that's talking about the government washing its hands of its responsibility through privatizing what should be publicly funded and publicly delivered services.

The other thing that's interesting, you know, is that with this bill this government is asking us to just trust them blindly with more than 10 per cent of our heritage trust fund. Something that's extremely disappointing is the fact that this fund, when Mr. Lougheed first created it, I believe, at the end of his term, was somewhere around \$15 billion. I'd be happy to stand corrected, but I believe that's about the ballpark figure. Sadly, as of December 31 that fund was still only \$17 billion, where we look at other jurisdictions that are wealthy from oil and gas, and they have hundreds of billions of dollars.

The thesis of my point, Madam Speaker, is that I cannot support this bill. Again, the government should just be funding the ministries that provide these services and not look to the private sector, shirk its responsibilities, wash its hands, and basically turn its back on Alberta's most vulnerable.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

On 29(2)(a), Calgary-Buffalo. Go ahead.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My question is to the hon. member. I'd like to get some thoughts just to sort of, I guess, give some background to the question I'm going to ask. You know, I look at this bill here, Bill 2, and the much ado we're making on the social impact bonds and putting the Alberta heritage trust fund to use and all that sort of stuff. It seems to me that largely the impetus for this bill is the result of the hon. Premier's promise to eliminate I believe it was child poverty in five years, which coincidentally should get us, I think, 40 per cent of the way there given the way of the mandate. I think, in particular, that this has been a promise that was largely looked at as being unattainable. In fact, the government has done absolutely nothing, in my view, to try and move in a direction that would not eliminate child poverty but even make child poverty less than it had been prior to them making the promise. They simply haven't done a thing or lifted a finger or done anything in regard to that.

I see this as sort of being something that they can trumpet around to the nonprofit groups, saying: "Oh, look what we're doing. We're really doing something. We care about the poor, the sick, and the disabled. We didn't really just promise it; we're actually going to go out there and do something about it. These shiny little social bonds are the way to do it."

My question to the hon. member is: what does he think would actually be better to move the plight of people in poverty situations, people who are in nonprofit, maybe whether to move Alberta from being the lowest jurisdiction in terms of welfare payments of the nation? You know, a single mother with one child, I think, hon. minister, gets about \$700 here in Alberta in terms of a welfare payment, where in virtually every other province they do much more reasonably, and they get treated in a much more dignified fashion. There's much research out there that says that looking at giving reasonable welfare payments actually allows for people to better their circumstances and move off the government dole much more easily. I'd just ask the hon. member if he thinks maybe adopting a reasonable welfare system to allow Albertans to live in dignity might be a better endeavour instead of going on this social innovative bonds or whatever this thing is that we're going down.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. Absolutely, there are solutions that are available, but again, this government is clearly in the pockets of large corporations that are looking at getting in on these types of programs and service delivery with guaranteed returns of investment. So increasing social assistance, increasing the minimum wage. Again, Alberta lags behind other jurisdictions considering we have the highest rate of inflation and the highest cost of living in this province.

I think, as well, many parents have said to me that child care is completely unaffordable, that if we had a system where parents could actually afford to get back into the workforce – I've got many friends that have two little kids, and it's costing them \$1,500, \$1,600 a month to have their kids in child care. Well, at that point the one parent is thinking: "Well, I might as well not even go to work. I mean, at the end of the day the difference between that is so minimal. I might as well stay home and raise my child." You know, that contributes to our worker shortage. Also, these are costs that parents shouldn't have to pay. There are

examples in other jurisdictions in Canada where child care is much more affordable, and that system is working very well.

Again, in this province there's an extremely high gap, and growing, between the rich and the poor. You know, if issues were addressed and we ensured that there was money available for people to get back onto their feet, that there were higher allowances for some of those folks who either were on AISH or on social assistance, if they were able to go out and find work, then there'd be that incentive as opposed to giving such a low threshold for them to earn in a week or in a month that many of them are deterred from even bothering to go out.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. That was 29(2)(a).

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do want to make a couple of comments regarding some of the comments that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview made when he talked about the fact that our fund could be hundreds of billions, like other jurisdictions and whatnot. The hon. Member for Airdrie, my learned friend, also made a comment that the fund would be \$150 billion if we had just left all the earnings and interest in the fund. The comment that I'd like to make is that that money was taken for use by the government of Alberta. It wasn't squandered. It wasn't mismanaged. It didn't disappear. It didn't evaporate. It wasn't stolen. It was used for the purposes of the government of Alberta.

Now, admittedly, some of that interest and some of those earnings from that fund were used to fund the operating budget. I would submit that there is nothing inherently wrong with using those funds for the operating budget. If you look at our record with respect to use of those monies after inflation-proofing, the heritage fund did a lot to help us build a lot of things here in Alberta. It helped us to keep the low tax environment, to have the Alberta advantage. The Alberta advantage, the low corporate and personal taxes that we have here in the province, and the low natural resource royalties: those fostered investment in this province. They built Alberta to the way it is now and created jobs, and those jobs broadened the tax base. I would argue that it's one of the reasons that Alberta has become a magnet for businesses, it's one of the reasons that CP Rail moved to Calgary, and it's one of the reasons that Calgary is number 3 in terms of head offices in Canada right now.

9:00

As I was mentioning, the other thing that the use of those funds from the heritage fund did was that it enabled us to build an awful lot of infrastructure, and that infrastructure helped us to grow our economy. It helped to build roads and to pave roads in rural Alberta so we could get products to market. It helped to build schools and hospitals to give us a good health care system, and yes, it even helped the social programs that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about. I would submit that there has to be a balance.

One would also look at what the cost would have been if we hadn't spent the money on those infrastructure projects in the past. What if we had waited 10 years to do it? Well, I can tell you that it would have cost a heck of a lot more than what it actually did. So there has to be a balance. Certainly, there has to be some savings, but using those savings as endowment funds, which is proposed by the bill, is the way to go in order to create a good economic climate and to create good infrastructure. I think that by using those funds judiciously, using them as an endowment fund, we're contributing to the future success of Alberta. We're trying to build

a better Alberta, to make the jurisdiction what it is, which is the envy of any jurisdiction around North America or the world.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you. I appreciate the comments from the hon. member, because I know the money was not simply flushed down the drain or the like. But my question centres around: one cannot get to the point where we are in this province and not look at the size of the heritage trust fund and the fact that over the last 25 years we have not saved a dime of fossil fuel resources and the fact that we are going to put on approximately \$21 billion in debt by 2017 and that our fiscal structure may be somewhat not to Alberta's advantage, may in fact be something closely akin to what they call the Laffer curve. Are you familiar with the Laffer curve? It's when your tax system is so far out of whack that it doesn't impact economic activity either positively or negatively anymore. It is, simply put, askew.

Now, is there an argument to be made, given that Alberta is the lowest taxed province by a country mile and that, arguably, as long as you remain the lowest taxed jurisdiction, your competitiveness is not impacted, that we would in fact be better off not trying to save some of this wealth for the future? Isn't it a more appropriate argument that, simply, where most of the money has gone is just a refusal to tax people and to pay as we go as a society – a conservative principle: pay for what you use in taxes – instead of arguing the other way, that this royalty wealth is ours to spend in one generation? I'd just like hear your thoughts on that matter.

Dr. Brown: Well, I know where the hon. member's party is coming from, and that is, you know, to keep taxing more and more. That hasn't been the philosophy of our government, and I think it's paid off in the long run because we have attracted businesses and jobs to the province. I think that if one looks at what the heritage fund has done, it's done a great deal for the province of Alberta. There's no disputing that. I think that we wouldn't have the province, we wouldn't have nearly the prosperity that we have today if we hadn't spent some of those funds.

I'm not sure exactly what you're referring to in terms of diminishing returns from the heritage fund, but I would say one other thing, and that is that the sustainability fund that this government put in place was one of the very best ideas because we know that natural resource revenues are cyclic in nature. They go up and they go down with the price of oil and with the Canadian dollar, so they are to a certain extent unpredictable by any government. But I think the fact that we've had that sustainability fund there is a very, very good buffer to what those effects of the cyclic nature of natural resource revenues have been.

Mr. Hehr: Have you ever given any thought to why the sustainability fund is gone? Could it be because we're so ridiculously undertaxed?

Dr. Brown: Well, I would say that it's not gone, number one, and number two, it's going to be growing quite substantially, if you listened to the Minister of Finance during his budget speech.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other speakers? There's still a minute left in 29(2)(a) if anybody else would like to address the

hon. Member for Calgary-*Mackay-Nose Hill*. The hon. Member for Edmonton-*Beverly-Clareview*.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's worth, you know, asking the hon. member to expand further his thoughts on – when we talk about revenues, again, I can appreciate that this government believes that we've been doing so well because the taxes are so low and because of our royalties. Yes, Alberta has done well. The issue I have is that when you've undercut yourself compared to every other jurisdiction, whether it's corporate taxes or personal income taxes or royalties, there is a huge sum of revenue that we are missing out on. Those three areas could be addressed, and we'd still be the most competitive jurisdiction in the country.

The other thing that I'd like to hear the hon. member's comments on is – you know, he talks about the dollars that we've spent, yet what I don't hear is the government's recognition, acknowledgement, of the massive infrastructure deficits that we have in this province, whether we're talking bridges, roads, schools, hospitals. So although the government would like to pat themselves on the back for a job well done over the last 30 years, what we're seeing now is a massive amount of . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading to Bill 1, Savings Management Act?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 2

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Dallas]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to talk briefly on the appropriation bill, a couple of things that I've stated earlier but, I think, need to be stated again. Maybe they'll be heard and acted upon sometime in the future.

Some of these comments stem largely from some information I just read on Twitter earlier this evening. No, it was actually a news article that I picked up there. In our Rocky Mountains right now we have some snowpack that equals the largest amount we've seen over the course of the last 50 or 60 years.

Mr. Campbell: Not true.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'm informed by the Government House Leader that it's not true, so I will immediately stop my rant. That's not true. I will continue to go on my rant regardless.

In any event, at least according to this news outlet – and allegedly they are misinformed, okay? – there is a large amount of precipitation in terms of snowpack that is in our Rocky Mountain region, and there is a strong likelihood or a better than normal chance of us having a recurred bout of flooding this summer. As we're aware, the statistics are that we have a 1 per cent chance every year of there being a flood. I would suggest that those numbers are higher. In fact, if you look in the way that I view the world, at least, global warming is going to cause more erratic weather patterns, and I think Alberta has seen its fair share of

those over the course of the last little while, and these are going to continue to happen.

9:10

In any event, my point is that in terms of the appropriation bill these expenses that we're seeing here are a result of a natural disaster that occurred this summer, with the flooding. In the main, many of them are. My hope is that this government is going to busy itself with two things. The first is mitigating for future floods. I know that there are a great deal of proposals out there. Allegedly, the government is working hard on implementing them. My hope is that that is true and that they continue to see this through from start to finish. We are well aware that this had not happened after the 2005 flood. This is referenced in the Groeneveld report, that we did not do the best we could to mitigate for future flood damage. My hope is that this time we move the other resources necessary to protect us from this inevitability happening.

Second thing – and I know that this idea would be better served in a national program, okay? – there is no doubt that a national flood insurance program would be preferable to a provincial flood insurance program. Simply put, if you can incorporate more people into an insurance plan, you're able to spread the risk, and they work better. I am well aware of that. I do note that the federal government in this year's budget did mention passingly the possibility of a national flood insurance program. I'm not going to hold my breath on that. In fact, it looked like it was merely mentioned in a throne speech just for the mentioning. It didn't look like the federal government appeared to make this a priority. I would suggest that that is probably going to remain the case.

Given that that is my synopsis, I would hope the various members of the government of the day across the aisle would, first off, explore the seriousness of the federal government's, I guess, appetite to put forward a national flood insurance program. If there is none, then we in Alberta have to seriously consider it or, I think, actually go it alone and devise our own flood insurance program.

There are some simple, pragmatic reasons why. First off, it's because it's in our best interests. Fifty-seven per cent, actually, of the disasters that have occurred in Canada over the course of the last number of years have happened in Alberta. My understanding is that this is because of our unique terrain and our location next to the Rocky Mountains. That, in fact, makes our water tributaries and other areas more prone to disaster. If we don't learn from the past, well, then we're destined to repeat this failure by not protecting ourselves.

Secondly, I honestly think that this is good public policy. It's good public policy that protects families and communities, and it also protects the public purse. People should be able to be protected in flood situations and know they're going to be paid out, okay? You do that through a provincial flood insurance program.

I will note that currently I see that, as in downtown Calgary, many insurance companies are even moving away from protecting many of my constituents from sewage backup claims and the like, that even the moderate amount of flood insurance that was available for many of my constituents will not be available the next time there is a flood, okay? This means that there will be more carnage, more damage, and more strife to families and communities should this flooding occur. Not even should: when this flooding occurs. That means that if the federal government doesn't do it, we need to do it to protect our families and communities.

Another reason why we need to do it is that this has been very expensive for the provincial government as well as the federal government. In order to do it, I think we've got a need, to use a phrase that I consider a bit of an oxymoron but that may resonate with some members on the opposite side of the aisle, for a conservative fiscal philosophy and having people pay for what they use in terms of damage claims they're going to pay out. Adopting a principle of a provincial flood insurance will enable the provincial government not to have to bail people out in the next event. They will have collected premiums and put together a scheme that people will essentially be bailing themselves out on a risk-adjusted premium, and this, to me, is an eminently reasonable principle to protect the taxpayers and, more importantly, protect future generations.

Let's face it. All of this stuff we're doing nowadays is just coming off royalties. You know, whether that's the building of schools, building of roads, building of hospitals, going into debt: it's all royalties all the time. Let's not even kid ourselves. That's what it is. So at least if we develop this program, we can actually protect maybe a small amount of royalties for when the oil and gas are gone and/or the world moves on. That would be another reason.

There's ample evidence throughout the world that basically every jurisdiction that is flood prone has moved to this, whether it's the United States, whether it's Europe or otherwise. Where they've had floods occurring, they have moved to this principle. So us not moving to this, I would say, is an absence of responsibility, and we need to follow through on this in some form or fashion.

I also think we're headed for 5 million people. There are getting to be a lot of people to get into a disaster insurance program. We need to look at it seriously and move on it at some point in time.

In any event, I got that off my chest, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to the government considering this, not just considering this, but, hopefully, moving on it. I think it's good public policy.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any more members who wish to speak to second reading of Bill 2, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll keep my comments fairly brief. I know that we were first told that this bill would be mostly flood related. I would say that most of it is but not all of it. I do find it interesting – and it needs to be pointed out – that, you know, hindsight is absolutely 20/20. However, at the same time, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different outcome. The government since last year has been talking about the floods being a 100-year flood and that this is so unique and all the rest. I mean, the real challenge with that is that then that leads to lethargy and an unwillingness to act. Our frustration has been that back from I believe it was the Groeneveld report, in either 2006 or 2007 – that was largely ignored by the government. It's frustrating that people's lives were so negatively affected and much could have been done in the way of prevention.

In this bill I hope that there will be dollars earmarked for, again, flood mapping. That was one of the first concerns or criteria that many members of this House, from all sides, have been calling for. You know, how can you look at preventive measures if we're not even sure which zones and areas are most vulnerable? I mean, that's one of the things that we would've done.

I can't help but look at a few other areas. When we're looking in this bill at Education, Education so far has been mostly announcements with very few shovels in the ground. We all know that schools take three to five years to build, which means that it's going to be years before many of the schools are built, are modernized. I mean, many schools are talking about overcrowding. We've got record class sizes. Despite the minister's belief that class size does not impact the quality of education, I challenge him to say that to a group of teachers and look at their facial expressions and the answers that they give back. You know, I mean, I'll save my comments on the budget for that time and the throne speech. Again, questions: when will these schools with the dollars earmarked in this bill be opening their doors? It's a big question that many folks are asking.

9:20

Something that I'd like to see is a willingness for the provincial government to sit down with school boards and municipalities and look at talking about how they're going to meet the needs of students today and tomorrow and look at regional growth and planning as opposed to having separate silos of organizations or individuals or orders of government trying to make decisions in isolation when, again, the location of our schools, the size of our schools, the construction of our schools, the layout of our schools are all going to be impacted by the areas in which they are. One of the reasons that the NDP has been adamantly opposed to P3s is because they do encourage the cookie-cutter model as opposed to looking at the specific needs of the community.

Again, I know that there are a bunch of dollars that are earmarked for transporting our royalties in kind to the market. You know, if we had a royalty structure that was adequately serving the needs of Albertans, then we wouldn't have to be giving massive corporate subsidies for the transportation of our product. Again, the Alberta NDP has been a strong advocate for investing in refineries and upgraders here in the province. If you want to ship a product, let's ship a refined product that's got value added. Let's keep the high-quality, high-paying jobs in the province.

Often, and even this evening, Madam Speaker, we've heard from members of the government side talking about all the jobs that are created in this province, but I would challenge them to look at how many high-paying, quality jobs with benefits and pensions have been lost and how many in these numbers of new jobs created are the McJobs or the minimum wage, low-paying jobs. I think they'd be quite surprised at those statistics.

Moving along, again, I know that there is money going into Aboriginal Relations and to help our indigenous friends around the province who have suffered a great deal and loss of homes. I appreciate that the minister, if I recall, stood up and answered some of my questions on that. I'm happy to see that those dollars are earmarked and that we're not forgetting about our First Peoples in this province.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will be supporting second reading of this bill. I just wanted to highlight a couple of my concerns but appreciate the necessity of these dollars going in and, again, hope that the government of Alberta today has learned from the mistakes of its past and that we're going to do a better job preparing for future disasters.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

We have 29(2)(a). Are there any members interested in comments or questions?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 5: Ms Smith]

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

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was pleased to hear in the government's throne speech its commitment that Alberta remains a beacon of opportunity for Albertans new and old who desire to build a stronger, modern, better province together.

The Lieutenant Governor noted that Alberta is the economic engine of Canada. This is indisputable, but, Madam Speaker, the citizens of the region that I represent would want me to remind this government that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is home to the industry that is the economic engine of Alberta. Unprecedented activity in Alberta's oil sands generates prosperity that is shared from Medicine Hat to High Level, from Lloydminster to Grande Prairie. This prosperity is the envy of provincial jurisdictions from Victoria to St. John's and benefits Canadians from all provinces and territories. I am certain that the government of Canada is at least as grateful for Alberta's fiscal contributions to Confederation as are the members of this Legislature since it actually derives a greater aggregate benefit from oil sands production than this province. In fact, some analysts have estimated that the oil sands now account for nearly 10 per cent of Canada's GDP.

That burgeoning prosperity, however, brings with it explosive population growth, as many as 100,000 new Albertans every year, and no community is better acquainted with the decade-plus challenge of addressing 7 to 16 per cent annual growth than Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo. Growth that fantastic puts pressure on land development, transportation infrastructure, education, health, human support services, policing, and the very social fabric of a community.

The designation of the urban development subregion in June 2013 will begin finally to ensure the availability of developable land in Fort McMurray that will stabilize housing prices and make it possible for new oil sands workers and their families to take up permanent residence in Fort McMurray, to pay taxes in this province, to strengthen the social fabric of this province, to harness their personal energies to build Alberta one Albertan at a time.

So I am encouraged to see the throne speech reaffirm the government's commitment to twin highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray and very pleased that this project remains on schedule for completion in 2016. I worked very hard, as this government knows, to help steer that project with my report entitled *Towards a Safer 63*, tabled in June 2012, and I'm proud to

have been part of fulfilling this promise to my constituents. Too many sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers have been lost on a highway that is inadequate for the nature and volume of traffic that flows to and from the region.

But as the government's own 2010 CRISP report amply demonstrates, twinning highway 63, even at a cost of more than \$800 million, while substantial, is merely the first step in a more comprehensive infrastructure program that must be delivered if Alberta is to safely and responsibly grow oil sands production and to justify its international efforts to secure new pipeline capacity and new markets around the world. Because they are awarded based on per capita funding formulas, municipal sustainability initiative and GreenTRIP funding are not adequate to keep up with that growth. The census data on which such grants are awarded are based on yesterday's numbers, not tomorrow's projections.

At the same time, however, the government's own financial capacity is constrained by inconstant revenues and the aftermath of last summer's floods, the largest natural disaster in Canada's history. So I strongly encourage this government to embrace the innovation that it champions and to explore with stakeholders the alternative delivery and finance instruments being proposed within Wood Buffalo to support the design, construction, and maintenance of new transportation infrastructure essential to our continued prosperity. It may be that government should not pay for every kilometre of pavement to support resource extraction, but government must be the enabler of a new way of doing business so that oil sands producers, railroads, and other private-sector parties can make meaningful contributions to transportation infrastructure.

Speaking of the impact of last June's flood events, Fort McMurray was one of two communities cited in August by the province as deserving special consideration to maintain its downtown development in a potential floodway. The throne speech specifically mentions that this government will make firm the commitment to build community mitigation projects in flood-affected communities. The Wood Buffalo regional council has already introduced measures to protect Fort McMurray, that will cost approximately \$160 million in order to comply with the government's one-in-a-100-year flood requirements. I look forward to hearing how the government will assist my community to meet those requirements in this budget.

Government also committed to investing in better seniors' care, focusing on aging-in-place developments. As all members of this Assembly are aware, Fort McMurray has been advocating for more than a decade for its first long-term care facility, the only such facility in a community of 80,000 people, that, if it were available, would free an entire floor of our critical care hospital.

9:30

I know that Alberta Health, Alberta Infrastructure, and Alberta Municipal Affairs are all in discussion with the regional municipality to bring this vision to fruition, not just long-term care but the full spectrum of aging-in-place accommodations for those Albertans who helped to convert the oil sands from Canada's largest research and development project to the engine of its economy and who are now entering the sunset of their lives. I urge the government to bring these negotiations with both the local and federal governments to a rapid close and to break ground on this long-overdue facility in the current calendar year.

Finally, I am heartened to see a renewed commitment to education and postsecondary education that recognizes the important contributions that will be made by the generation just now entering adulthood to Alberta's prosperity over the next several decades. The several endowment funds and additional

funding for the Alberta heritage scholarship fund to support apprenticeship, trade, and technology students announced in Bill 1 will be welcomed by my constituents. We in Wood Buffalo know well the deficit of skilled tradespeople required to be overcome if we are to grow Alberta's prosperity.

Further support for the Campus Alberta model also suggests to me that there are new opportunities for Keyano College to expand its offerings and to become the nucleus for advanced education in northern Alberta. I anticipate hearing about exciting new developments between government and the college from President Kevin Nagel in the coming year. The funding for these new education initiatives is coming from our savings, and as any parent would tell you, making long-term investments in your children's education is always wise.

However, as I emphasized when I began, I hope this government is equally committed to enabling long-term investment in critical infrastructure that will also allow Alberta to grow its revenues, making it easier to fund new initiatives without diminishing our savings account and providing the necessary foundation for new opportunities to be realized by our better educated children and our children's children.

Mr. Speaker, I have never said that government should operate like a business but, rather, that it should operate with sound business practice. As such, we need to ensure that we provide strategic investment where we will realize our greatest returns. This province has weathered more than one storm since the global economic contraction in 2008. It is time now to take stock of our opportunities, obligations, and aspirations and to make wise choices that will yield meaningful dividends in 20 years.

For that reason, I'm looking forward to the upcoming process in estimates for the government's budget for 2014-15 to find evidence of those choices. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Is anybody interested in asking any questions of or making any comments to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo?

Seeing none, we'll move on to our next reply to the throne speech. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to stand and respond to my second Speech from the Throne. Hard to believe how fast time flies. I'm going to talk a little bit about where I was hoping the Speech from the Throne would have gone as far as a little more detail, and then I'd like to lay out some vision for members to consider.

I know that in the Speech from the Throne there was talk – and first I'll start with one of the issues closest to my heart, which is education – that there would be 50 new schools, 70 modernizations. Now, as we've already seen, unfortunately, that's where the funding ends. So as far as keeping previous campaign promises that this Premier made as far as full-day kindergarten, that's not in here whatsoever or referenced, and that's a promise that I think is going to remain broken right through until the next election.

That is unfortunate, Madam Speaker, because the full-day kindergarten program is something that many communities are talking about, about how crucial it would be and about the opportunities it would provide. That's something that many parents have told me about the schools that do provide it. There are some throughout the province. Unfortunately, they have to pull funding from other areas in order to fund full-day kindergarten programs. I believe that if a politician, especially the Premier,

makes a promise, then he or she should ensure that they fulfill that promise.

Keeping class sizes low was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. You know, I would challenge the minister to speak to many classes around the province to see that they're actually at record highs. They're nowhere near the recommendations that came out from the Learning Commission years ago. I mean, I've heard from and talked with parents who have kids in classes as big as 55-plus, and I'm not talking about your gym class or your drama class. It just seems absurd to me, especially as a former teacher, to think of how they can possibly offer high-quality instruction and that quality one-on-one time when there are that many students in a classroom.

The other concern here, Madam Speaker, is not just the numbers but, again, really being aware of the class makeup, the composition, of who the students are in today's classrooms. I can tell you that they are very different. It's very much changed over the last few decades. We have a significant number of ELLs, English language learners, in our classrooms. This is attributed partly to many of the new Albertans moving into our province, which is fantastic, and that provides richness and diversity in our classrooms. However, it also comes with certain challenges, and from the teachers and school boards that I've been speaking with, they don't feel that there is adequate support there. Then you combine that with an increasing number of special-needs students and with a shortage of funding and of supports. So that was a real concern.

The other thing that needs to be addressed, Madam Speaker, I referenced earlier. There is a significant – it's actually quite staggering – price tag around the infrastructure deficits province-wide when we look at school boards. I believe the Calgary board of education has a \$200 million infrastructure deficit. I know Edmonton public's in the next few years is creeping up to \$20 million. These are significant costs. Again, I've often used an analogy comparable to someone owning a car. If they never take their car in to get the oil changed or to get upkeep on the car, it will run, but it's going to start falling apart, and it's going to get to the point where it will be so expensive to fix that it's almost just cheaper to replace it, which is, I think, the reality for many schools.

I've talked to many principals, and there is a big frustration with the fact that many schools are potentially on the chopping block and are being debated as far as being closed. You know, I'd like to remind the minister that there are many, many benefits to community schools and that there are many options that I wish this government would explore, that we would explore, to keep community schools open and to keep communities together, again, cutting back on transportation costs. Shipping kids off on one-hour, two-hour bus rides per day just seems short sighted to me, Madam Speaker.

As well, I want to talk about health care and the fact that I know that the federal government is transferring somewhere around a billion dollars, an additional billion dollars, that this government has to use that is earmarked for health care, yet the responses that I've heard are that there's a large portion of it that is, in fact, going to go into general revenues and not to be applied to health care, which I think is quite shameful, and many Albertans aren't happy with that decision.

When we speak about home care, prior to this government bringing in private contractors and private companies to deliver home care, the in-house home-care services were working phenomenally well. We've met with many different providers who were upset and with many seniors' groups who were outraged at the fact that home care was privatized. In fact, Madam Speaker,

when I was out door-knocking yesterday, I spoke with a gentleman whose wife is crippled and can't get out of bed without assistance. Since it's been privatized, her quality of care has plummeted, and there are times when they miss giving her her meds. Her proper supports aren't there. Yes, he has obviously made his voice heard and complained numerous times.

But it's quite frustrating, Madam Speaker, when I look at the plight of many seniors. I look at the fact that, you know, costs of living continue to go up. Seniors are on a fixed income. Many of them require supports and services, and many of them feel that this government is turning its back on them. It's quite disrespectful of the fact that, again, seniors are the folks that helped build this province and make Alberta as rich socially, culturally, and economically as we are. I get quite frustrated, and, you know, there are groups that have been quite vocal.

9:40

Actually, as a preview, I have a group from one of the homes in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview coming tomorrow. They lost their home care contract, but they wrote hundreds of letters and had their voices heard and were involved in our round-tables and ended up getting their home care back in-house. It shows you, Madam Speaker, what people can do when they come together as a collective voice. Unfortunately, it also shows how this government needs to be chided into doing the right thing as opposed to leading by example.

When we talk about leading by example, you know, I'll touch on the fact that, again, what's interesting with municipalities, Madam Speaker, is that municipalities really are the grassroots, day-to-day, on-the-ground service providers that most Albertans are aware of and interact with. You know, I find it surprising that municipalities receive the least amount of revenue from taxes yet provide the bulk of services that people rely on on a day-to-day basis, from snow removal to road repair to police, EMS to many programs that folks rely on.

I'd like to see more of a priority and, again, an acknowledgement that our two largest cities in this province, Calgary and Edmonton, are extremely unique in the services they provide and of the fact that there are many services that, no matter where a person lived outside of Edmonton or Calgary, they would have to come to Edmonton or Calgary for those services, which makes them quite unique. They're also two of our areas that are growing at a rapid pace and therefore need to have the ability to generate a proper income stream to support all of the services and programs that Albertans rely on on a day-to-day basis.

I also think, you know, that the issue of transportation needs to be dealt with. I know that in the budget there was funding for GreenTRIP, yet there are big questions around building our infrastructure to help Albertans, at least in our major cities, become less reliant on automobiles, to encourage public transportation. There is the economic benefit, there is the environmental benefit to that.

Madam Speaker, I wished as well that in the throne speech – in the New Democrat Speech from the Throne there would be also the addressing of many of the different issues that are facing our indigenous communities and a real importance placed on the fact that more needs to be done to, first of all, honour treaties that were signed many, many years ago to acknowledge our First Peoples but also to engage in meaningful consultation.

I can't tell you how many times I've spoken to different representatives from different bands and different groups within our indigenous communities and how frustrated they are that they hear the same thing over and over, that they're going to be consulted, and then they get hit in the face with a bill that gets

dropped with no notice or changes to policies or the fact that they get cut out from conversations. I find it quite ironic that certain groups have told me that they get better consultation from industry than they do from the government. That speaks volumes.

Sorry. I missed a point as far as seniors. When we're looking at the fact that we've got an increasing number of Albertans that are aging, that are retiring, and that we have a serious shortage of long-term care facilities, of beds for our seniors, again, this should be a priority. I'm adamantly opposed to the private delivery of seniors' care. Again, this comes back to the simple issue that private corporations' bottom line is to earn profit. If that is their number one priority, then it's not providing the highest quality of care for our seniors, and therefore that shouldn't even be on the table, Madam Speaker.

I look at the fact that the Premier made a promise years ago to eliminate poverty, and eliminating child poverty isn't even addressed in the throne speech whatsoever. As other members have pointed out – my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona pointed it out – we're now in year 3 of a five-year promise and nowhere near addressing the issues facing child poverty and eliminating child poverty. You know, I find it quite hypocritical when the government will tout one thing and what they're doing, yet on the flip side they're making massive cuts to programs and services that would help to reach these goals. Again, last year's budget had a massive cut to postsecondary, yet there are claims that they're investing in postsecondary. Believe me, Madam Speaker, Albertans aren't being fooled by these fanciful words.

You know, for the Alberta NDP there are services that should be publicly funded and publicly delivered, and strengthening those systems would do much more to reduce our costs and, again, to invest in Albertans and to improve our quality of life. Alberta suffers from the lowest minimum wage in the country, and we

have the largest income gap, that is continually growing on a daily basis. You know, this speech doesn't go far enough to address the issues of child poverty, of the growing income gap between the rich and poor, meaning that middle-class families are being squeezed further and further every day.

Madam Speaker, I mean, there are some real simple solutions, including addressing our revenue shortfall, that this government refuses. I just want to point out one line in the Speech from the Throne, that says, "... holding spending below population and inflation growth until 2016." Well, by doing that, you are essentially making cuts. You are not investing in education. We have a hundred thousand new people moving to Alberta every year. Where are the dollars for schools, beds, roads, hospitals? The Alberta NDP would invest in Albertans today and tomorrow as opposed to this PC government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who'd like to comment or question the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview?

Seeing none, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, at this point I'd like to adjourn debate on the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, at this late hour, mindful of the good progress that we've made tonight, I'd like to move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:48 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 11, 2014

Issue 6a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 11, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

Holy and Great Creator, help us be ever mindful that our purpose here is to represent others and also to remain true to ourselves and to the democratic values and traditions to which we committed ourselves to uphold. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

17th Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we do the visitors, let me just make a brief statement, if I could, because it's a special anniversary celebration for three members who are celebrating their 17th election anniversary, in particular the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Let us applaud their anniversary.

Thank you.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you someone who is no stranger to this Assembly or these halls, a good friend of mine, a mentor who everyone knows, Mike Cardinal. Mike was a member here for over two decades and represented me as my MLA, and now it's an honour for me to be his MLA. He was a great adviser and mentor as I stepped into this. He served Alberta well in five different cabinet portfolios and accomplished a great deal for Alberta.

Thanks for being here, Mike.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with the Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you 73 young individuals from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. From Ellerslie Campus school, Mr. Speaker, they are joined by their teachers and parent helper: Mr. Kristopher Skinner, Mr. Richard Sampson, Miss Amy Heidebrecht, and Mrs. Myrna D'Mello. They're sitting in both the public and members' galleries. At this time may I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other introductions, beginning with the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our hon. Health minister it's my pleasure to introduce Dr. Michael Cassidy, president of the section of anesthesia of the Alberta

Medical Association, and Dr. Doug DuVal, treasurer of the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society and past president of the section of anesthesia of the Alberta Medical Association. It is indeed a pleasure to have Dr. Cassidy and Dr. DuVal here today to represent the great work that is being done in our province and in our country regarding anesthesiology. They're here to meet with our Health minister's department on a number of items, including how to best create and maintain efficiencies in surgery, improving the patient experience, and reducing wait times. I want to thank them for being here and for all of their hard work on this file, and at this point I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you 17 interns who began their careers working for local governments thanks to the municipal internship program. This program has provided these interns with an opportunity to gain real life experience within municipal government, supporting our province's towns, villages, counties, municipal districts, and cities. They join almost 200 interns who have been part of this program since 2002. The Municipal Affairs initiative contributes to the administrative strength and management of our municipalities right across the province with employees who bring professional skills, training, and a passion for public service at the local level, and what could be better than that? They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask all of them to rise and receive the acknowledgement of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very special guests from Emmanuel Home, a nonprofit seniors' residence in the Belvedere neighbourhood in my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Last year I received many letters from the residents of Emmanuel Home asking for the government to stop plans to replace their home-care contract with services from a private, for-profit provider. I was happy to celebrate a victory with them when their home-care contract was extended. I ask them now to stand, if possible, as I read their names and remain standing as we give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: executive director Darren Sinke, Karin Kossman, Ann Hexspoor, Annie Fechner, Roeli Moes, Bill Breeuwsma, John Bruinsma, Jane Maat, Martin and Christine Veenstra, Maria Pool, Anky van Dieken, Hazel Rilling, Gladys Pavletic, Anne Mitchell, Clarence Toornstra, Aria Klyn-Hesselink. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to introduce some of his staff that are here in the gallery today. There are over 2,000 public servants who work in communities throughout the province on behalf of that ministry. Today staff from High Prairie, Athabasca, and Slave Lake offices are visiting the Alberta Legislature. We have Mark Heckbert, Jim Castle, Kevin Downing,

Myles Brown, Kristy Wakeling, Mike Banko, Denyse Gullion, Marcel Macullo, Michelle Keohane, and Jennifer MacCormick with us. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, it is with honour that I rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very special guest. First and foremost, I would like to introduce you to Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies. Dr. Tran-Davies is a doctor from Calmar, Alberta. She is a parent, and Dr. Tran-Davies is showing immense strength, courage, and conviction in standing up for Alberta students. You see, Dr. Tran-Davies is leading the charge in making the population in Alberta aware of the curriculum changes that are taking place in our schools. There are now nearly 10,000 signatures on her petition calling on the government to rethink its rewrite of the Alberta curriculum and go back to the basics that have served Alberta students so well. I'd like to ask Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies to stand, Mr. Speaker, and along with her today are Jerry and Jeanne Manegre, Marion and Bill Leithead, Maurya Braun, and Debra Hoover, just a few of the many who are supporting the grassroots initiative. I'm so proud of them and the courage that they're showing. I'd ask my colleagues to give the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?
Seeing none, let us move on.

Members' Statements

1:40 Cancer Charities Fund Raising

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I'm going to chop off my hair. There are several groups who collect hair like mine, and they make wigs for children and youth who have lost their hair due to cancer treatment. As well, I'll buzz my hair down to nothing, and a lot would say that it's about time. And from that I can make a rhyme.

My mom used to do that,
so tit-for-tat.

A poet she was. People gave her lots of time
and would gather to hear her rhyme.
Cancer struck her later in her years,
bringing us many tears.

Dad, he loved the outdoors.
Cancer as well took him away,
and I would like to say
that for me,
Alberta is the perfect place for us to find the key
that will chase away this dreaded disease.

The not-for-profit sector plays a huge role,
and so it is. That is why I did enrol
with Kids Cancer Care, a group that does,
Mr. Speaker, I mean care.
Funds I'm raising, soon to be five digits
with everyone's help today.

And for my friend Shanna,
keep up the battle.
And for you and the three baby Lows,
please receive the love and prayers of this Assembly.
Jocelyn and family,
you are not forgotten.

Cancer affects us all;
one in four Albertans will die from cancer.
So please, tomorrow feel all welcome to come out.
L'école Gabrielle-Roy is the spot,

11:30 is the appointed time,
and that will about end my rhyme.

Alberta truly is the place to beat cancer, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to do just a little smidge to help that along and to help Kids Cancer Care work with children and youth affected.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McAllister: I'm sure I speak on behalf of us all, Mr. Speaker, when I say to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, "Well done."

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, there is an intense debate under way in Alberta over the curriculum in our schools and the teaching methods being used to educate our children. Traditional learning methods are being thrown out the window in favour of new inquiry-based or discovery learning.

Now, inquiry-based learning calls for less focus on facts and content and more emphasis on competencies and critical thinking skills. This is what it means in mathematics. Instead of having kids master and memorize their times tables, discovery math encourages students to invent their own strategies and techniques. What is that leading to? Well, kids are bewildered and frustrated. Instead of being taught the fundamentals and building on those, they are drowning in an ocean of confusion that the minister and his department have tossed them into. Marks are dropping in record numbers, and parents are forced to look for additional help outside the system they once put their trust in. When it comes to the effect these changes are having, the proof really is in the pudding. The facts do not lie. The most recent PISA results show that Alberta's education rankings in math are slipping substantially.

One individual in particular has risen and stood up for the integrity of our education system. Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies, a doctor and parent from Calmar, Alberta, started a petition pleading with the minister to return to the classroom basics. This is a classic David-and-Goliath story, where one concerned, everyday Albertan is going to battle with a stubborn multibillion-dollar bureaucracy that won't listen. I hear daily from teachers, parents, mathematicians, experts, students, and average Albertans that they, too, stand with Dr. Tran-Davies. In fact, 10,000 have now signed the petition.

The minister views all of this as a thorn in his side. He should view it as a wake-up call, Mr. Speaker. We are imploring the minister to make the appropriate changes before the next school year so another group of kids won't also suffer the same failed fate being pushed into the classrooms. It is his duty to listen to Albertans and the students and parents in the education system.

The Speaker: Thank you. Calgary-Bow, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Seniors' Supports

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is fully committed to building Alberta, committed to building upon the achievements of previous generations of Albertans. Our seniors helped build the strong and thriving province that we have today, and we owe them our thanks, our respect, and our support. We're meeting that obligation with programs that provide the right care in the right place at the right time.

With approximately 60 Albertans turning 65 every day, Budget 2014 is providing increases for several programs and services that help seniors stay at home and maintain their dignity and quality of

life. For example, the Alberta seniors' benefit provides 150,000 low-income seniors with financial assistance. Budget increases will help seniors who need this support.

To help seniors stay in their own homes, Budget 2014 is allocating additional funding to the seniors' property tax deferral program to help seniors defer all or part of their annual property taxes with a very low-interest loan.

The special needs assistance program helps seniors with items such as appliances, essential home repairs, and some medical expenses. Increased funding will help ensure that this unique program continues to be available to our most vulnerable seniors facing unexpected costs.

Almost 110,000 Albertans, most of them seniors, depend on home care, and funding for home care and rehabilitation services is increasing by 44 per cent. Now, that includes funding for home care for a thousand people after they go home from the hospital.

Now, the first priority of this government is investing in families and communities. Budget 2014 makes that investment by renewing our commitment to helping seniors remain in their homes and stay connected with their communities, families, and friends.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 10 to 16 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. As we all know, agriculture is part of the foundation of this province and our largest renewable resource industry. Each and every year we celebrate Agricultural Safety Week as a way to raise awareness, but the truth is that farm safety needs to be a year-round priority.

Some of the keys to making sure that our farms are safe are education, awareness, and planning. This year the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association's theme for farm safety week is to get with the plan. We are encouraging all producers, farm workers, communities, and organizations to develop written health and safety plans to identify hazards and control them. Our government is committed to working on initiatives that promote a culture of safety on our farms. Our farm safety co-ordinators work hard across the province on assessment, improvement, and the further development of farm safety systems. We also work with organizations such as 4-H and agricultural societies to enhance awareness of farm safety.

In fact, to kick off Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, Agriculture and Rural Development has teamed up with Health Services to provide a fun, interactive health and safety learning environment for kids of all ages at the Peace Country Classic Agri-Show in Grande Prairie. Also, people can always go to Agriculture and Rural Development's website to access everything from printable children's activity sheets to webinars and the latest documents and links on farm safety.

I encourage all Albertans to consider the role they have to play in farm safety and to look for ways to participate in their community, whether by implementing a farm safety plan or by teaching our children how to play safely on the farm. Farm safety needs to be a year-round commitment for everyone, and this week is a good reminder of that commitment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, we can get one more in quickly.

Northern Alberta Windstorm

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between January 15 and 18 of this year Alberta residents experienced again one of the most severe, widespread, and damaging windstorms with record-setting winds as high as 120 kilometres per hour, winds that tore through and toppled power lines and structures in northwestern and east-central Alberta, causing nearly 14,000 customers to lose power. Extreme weather, it seems, is a fact of life in Alberta, but this was a serious situation for both ATCO Electric crews and their customers.

At peak periods ATCO Electric had between 65 and 75 crews working simultaneously across the province. The windstorm was so severe that it damaged the electrical system infrastructure so that crews had to install temporary structures while permanent repairs were completed. Within a 24-hour period ATCO Electric crews, remarkably, had restored power to 12,000 customers.

Mr. Speaker, today I wish to acknowledge and to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to the ATCO Electric crews that braved extreme weather conditions and worked around the clock to repair structural damage and restore power as quickly and safely as possible during one of the worst storms in northern Alberta's history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, for the last little while we've been examining the abuse of the government air fleet. But let us be very, very clear. The Premier isn't the only person abusing government planes. Today's *Herald* story details how often planes fly around half empty while other government planes take off half empty, headed to the same place at the same time. It seems like no members of this cabinet actually want to travel with each other. My question is to the Finance minister, whose department runs the fleet. What is going on over there?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, government officials, including the Lieutenant Governor, including the Premier, including members of cabinet, including others, all carry out some important work throughout the province each and every day. There are some 90 communities in this province that are not actually serviced through commercial aircraft. There are times – and this is one of the issues of having scheduling conflicts – when one plane might be leaving within half an hour or an hour or at the same time as another plane is going to the same destination, and then that plane might go on to somewhere else like Medicine Hat, and another plane might go on to Grande Prairie. There are positioning issues that need to be dealt with. There are deadheads that need to be dealt with as well.

Ms Smith: Well, that wasn't very convincing, was it, Mr. Speaker?

The story mentions abuse of the air fleet by the Finance minister, the former Seniors minister, the Transportation minister, the former tourism minister, and the associate minister for High River among others. Even with all of these ministers and all of their staff and all of the government officials at Finance, apparently no one was paying attention to the fact that the government had multiple planes leaving from the same place and

headed to the same place, and none of them were full. Doesn't anybody in that cabinet care about the taxpayer?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we care a great deal about what the taxpayer is charged for travel around the province. We also care about getting to other areas of the province that cabinet ministers are expected to get to. Yes, it's true, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Cabinet ministers use our planes. That's what they're for, for us to get around to meet with Albertans and greet Albertans.

The Premier has already directed the Auditor General to review the capacity, the usage, the policies and procedures that we have in place. We have a policy in place today for requesting the planes. It was developed in 2010 from the Auditor General's report. We look forward to his next report.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the news story mentions at least 10 instances when no one in that cabinet or the government backbench was looking out for taxpayers. We have the highest paid Premier in the country, the highest paid cabinet in the country. The sunshine list shows that they employ the largest and most expensive political staff in the country, yet no one thought to do something as simple as co-ordinate flights so that the taxpayer didn't get shafted. Why should taxpayers have any confidence or trust in anyone in this government?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. member would like Albertans to think that we all have the same calendar and we all have the same schedule. Unfortunately, we all have different stakeholders who all request us at different times. The Premier has many stakeholders in the province, and they expect her to be there on time. Sometimes those schedules conflict. Ten flights out of the thousands of flights that we do every day: yes, we would like to see it come down. We are working diligently on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: No other province has government planes, and now we can see why, Mr. Speaker.

Let me give you another example of the government air fleet getting abused by more than just the Premier. On Thursday, October 25, 2012, a government plane flew into Grande Prairie at 4:30 p.m. and left at 10 p.m. The manifest said that it went to Grande Prairie for meetings with government officials. However, at 5:30 p.m. that evening the PCs were hosting their Grande Prairie PC leader's dinner fundraiser. Two ministers joined the Premier on the flight to attend the PC fundraiser. Will the Finance minister be seeking reimbursement from the PC Party?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was one of the cabinet ministers that was present with the Premier in Grande Prairie at that time. We made an announcement, as the hon. members should know, with respect to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital. The announcement specifically talked about the progress on the construction of the hospital, an update on the total cost for that facility. This is one example of the important government business that we do using the aircraft that are funded by the taxpayers of this province.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the former Infrastructure minister and the current Health minister were both on that flight to attend meetings with government officials. Now, I'm sure the fact that it landed just in time for the PC fundraiser was just a fortunate coincidence. Can either of the ministers provide Albertans with a detailed

report on which government officials they met with and what important briefings they received in the 45 minutes before the PC fundraiser started?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, they talk about transparency. The very fact that we're talking about this in this House means that it is very transparent because all of these manifests are listed online. Any Albertan can go and have a look at where the cabinet is flying and who is with them on the flights. Again, there are times when these planes fly empty because they are returning to base. We have only one base; that's the Edmonton base. Deadheads are something that I watch very, very carefully, but as any airline will tell you or any charter airline or anybody who owns planes will tell you, you have to manage those deadheads because people don't always come back when you want them to.

Ms Smith: Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, the flight leaving Grande Prairie for Calgary that night had the then-ministers of Tourism, Intergovernmental Relations, Energy, and Health joining the Premier. The associate minister of electricity was on it, too. Again, I'm sure it was just a pleasant coincidence that the government plane was in town to fly all these ministers back from a PC Party fundraiser. To the Finance minister: what is the government policy on having the taxpayer subsidize the fundraising activities of the governing party?

The Speaker: Government policy, if you will.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's hard to find government policy within a question that is baited like that, and I'm not going to take the bait. Albertans don't want us to be debating that kind of thing in this House. They want us to be talking about building Alberta. They want us to be moving forward. If the hon. member cared to, she could request the policy that we have for requisitioning the planes, the scheduling, the procedure, and all of that. They're very well aware of it. They just choose to not bring it up in here because they're choosing to leave some other impression in Albertans' minds. Despicable.

Mr. McAllister: This government needs no help leaving an impression.

Mathematics Curriculum

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, several days ago the Minister of Education promised to ensure that Alberta students learn the basics of math. Unfortunately, his radical new math curriculum tosses out tried, tested, and true learning methods in favour of new-age, bureaucratic fads. One of the most common concerns that I have heard from parents is that nowhere in this new math curriculum are kids explicitly required to memorize and master their times tables. To the minister: at what grade level will you require students to master their times tables up to 10 by 10, or do you consider this a basic skill?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we answered this question last week, and I can repeat it. He asked me: "Will the Minister of Education do the right thing and ensure, not provide an option but ensure, that the fundamentals of mathematics like times tables are taught in our schools?" The answer that I gave was: "I will." [interjections] I believe currently, right now, it's in grade 5 they must know those. I think there are recommendations by others for grade 3. Nonetheless, we are doing some work on the curriculum, as the member knows. [interjections] The information that we've got from the petitions and others and world best practices are all

going to go into that to make our curriculum stronger, and we'll be delivering on the things we've promised.

The Speaker: It would help if there was no heckling during the answers. Perhaps everyone could then share in the hearing of the answers given.

Hon. member, first supplementary.

Mr. McAllister: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that nearly 10,000 parents, teachers, experts, and everyday people have signed a petition saying that this new system just is not working for their kids, who are stressed out and frustrated by the confusing curriculum, Mr. Minister, we can't wait until 2016 to make changes. The future of our kids is at stake. Can you tell this Legislature what specific steps you will take to ensure that the basic fundamentals of math, including the mastery and memorization of times tables, are taught in our schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, he's referring to a petition as well, and the first thing I want to do is thank Dr. Tran-Davies and the parents and the engaged Albertans who have signed that petition and have taken the time to get engaged in the education system. It's critical. What we've communicated to Dr. Tran-Davies is that her input is not only valuable but very timely. As the member knows, we do have an entire group of Albertans across the province – school boards, parents, business community – that are working on prototypes for a new curriculum to solve that particular concern of parents and even go beyond and do others that the business community and others are asking us to do in the curriculum as well.

2:00

Mr. McAllister: Minister, if we're working out a solution in here, I'm thrilled. Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies started a petition that nearly 10,000 people have signed so far pleading with the government to reconsider its new math approach. Given that the very courageous Dr. Tran-Davies is here today, will the minister, not his deputy minister, not his chief of staff, commit to sitting down and meeting with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies and her team of experts today as they have been asking him to for months?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, every chance I get to meet with parents, I take it. We have met with Dr. Tran-Davies three times. This member continues to play politics with our students, so what I would ask him: if this is such a critical issue for him and for the Wildrose, as the critic for education working on this file for two years, not once in that two years has he contacted me and asked for a meeting. Not once has he sent an e-mail or a phone call or sent a letter asking me to change the curriculum. But he'll politicize this and grandstand in here and at press conferences. Let's have a real discussion about it.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Airdrie, your point of order is noted at 2:03 p.m.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to the Galleries

The Speaker: Hon. members on all sides of the House, it is not our purpose to try and engage guests or visitors in our discussions and debate. De facto, they are not part of our discussion and debate on the Assembly floor. Granted, our discussions and debates and questions and answers concern them greatly, but, strictly speaking, the debate is here amongst elected members, so let's please try and keep to that if you don't mind. It's okay to

reference them, but to point them out and try and get them engaged is not within our realm.

Let us move on to the leader of the Liberal opposition, from Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Cabinet Air Travel Expenses

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Still more examples of the Premier's sense of entitlement and waste of taxpayers' dollars: today we learned that the Premier and an aide or two or three frequently fly on one plane while other members of the PC caucus take a different flight to the same destination within an hour of Redforce One's departure. In all of these cases the PC MLAs, the Premier, and members of the imperial court could have fit on one plane. To the Premier: why don't you just 'plane pool'? Mr. Speaker, I don't know if 'plane pool' is a word, but why don't you save the taxpayer some money and 'plane pool'?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, what they're referring to is a news article that appeared, I guess, this morning from, I believe, the *Calgary Herald* that talked about 10 instances over the past two years – 10 instances over the past two years – where a government aircraft departed from and/or arrived at the same location at a nearby airport within the hour. We do our best to ensure that the calendars and the flights leaving are co-ordinated as best as possible. We do have a lot of flights every year because our ministers are getting around this province and they are doing the work that Albertans elected them to do.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder this government can't balance the budget. They're minimizing something that is a major mismanagement problem.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's chief of staff earns more than President Obama's chief of staff. Her director of communications earns more than the president's director of communications. A lot of people in the imperial court make a lot of money. But despite this high-priced talent, there's apparently nobody who can figure out how to get the Premier from point A to point B at a responsible cost. To the Premier: instead of spending 300 grand on new letter-writers to respond to your Travelgate complaints, why don't you just hire a travel agent at a fraction of the cost?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've said in this House, as the front bench we're very concerned about making sure that taxpayers get value for dollars, and that's critical. That's one of the reasons we've asked the Auditor General to take the steps that we have. It's one of the reasons I've asked the Minister of Finance to take steps with respect to tendering for RFPs. But the hon. member's reference to the correspondence unit is inappropriate only because these are professional public servants that are communicating with Albertans when they write to the Government of Alberta and the Premier asking about government policy. This is an important part of the democratic process, and I wish the hon. member wouldn't minimize it.

Dr. Sherman: Premier, there you go again.

Mr. Speaker, the latest chapter in the Travelgate scandal must not distract us from the heart of the matter, which is this. The Premier still has not paid back the \$45,000 she acknowledged that she wasted on the South Africa trip. Maybe she hopes Albertans have forgotten. Premier, I can assure you that they have not. To the Premier. You're rich. You get paid well. You receive a generous party allowance. When will you pay back the \$45,000 you wasted?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this House, we're very concerned about ensuring that there are systems in place to ensure that this unfortunate incident doesn't happen again. It's why I've asked the Auditor General and taken the steps that I have to ground the planes, to review the process for making decisions about out-of-province travel, to ask the Finance minister to deal with these issues. But I really wish the hon. member wouldn't make false assertions in this House with respect to what I may or may not receive.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we know the planes are grounded because the cabinet is all here.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Mason: I'm going to ask about something else, and it's the high price of electricity. There's an ongoing public fight between TransAlta and the province's electricity watchdog over allegations that the company intentionally manipulated the market to increase their profit margin, and there's a class-action lawsuit against Direct Energy, which shows that this deregulated electricity market is not working for Albertans. My question is to the Energy minister: why is your government failing to protect Albertans from market manipulation and high power prices?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Electricity and Renewable Energy to respond.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been many questions in this House in the last week of this nature. I can't emphasize enough that this government cares about electricity consumers. The Direct Energy case that's noted has been heard by the Alberta Utilities Commission as well, and they've made orders that directly respond to the consumers' needs, including issues around bills. I think they've done a fine job.

The Speaker: Just before we go on to the supplemental, I wonder if I could get the Minister of Justice to quickly comment. Is this matter sub judice or not?

Mr. Denis: I believe this matter is before the courts, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You believe it is?

Mr. Denis: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Then please govern yourself accordingly, hon. leader of the ND opposition, with your supplemental, if you would, please.

Mr. Mason: I understand.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: I was referencing the case but not asking about it specifically.

Documents clearly show that the PC's mess of an electricity system allows companies to manipulate the market in order to increase their profit margins and that aggressive marketing tactics and outrageous late fees have seen Direct Energy be the subject of literally hundreds of complaints to the Better Business Bureau. The system is not working for Alberta families. Can the Energy minister tell us why this government operates an electrical system that works for power companies' profits but against consumers?

The Speaker: Hon. associate minister, if you wish to respond.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Answering these types of questions that we've had over the last week gets to the borderline of political interference into ongoing decisions that are being heard before the courts or before the Alberta Utilities Commission. If we are talking about the protection of consumers, I think every one of us has to pay attention to the kinds of questions and answers we provide in this House. We cannot politicize regulatory process.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, please be very careful with your question here as the Justice minister has indicated that the matter is sub judice. It means it's before the courts. Now, that's his comment. So let's hear your final supplementary.

Mr. Mason: With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, this just doesn't bear on any court cases. This bears on government negligence in imposing a deregulated electricity system on the people of this province and driving up prices so that power companies can make more money, and the dodge that was given by that associate minister just doesn't cut it.

I want to ask the real Energy minister this question. Are power prices in this province too high or not? Yes or no?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: The unreal Energy minister will answer your question. The real questions that we think are fundamental to Albertans are: are companies in this province allowed to engage in anticompetitive behaviour? The answer is no. Are Albertans being protected? Absolutely. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada without a public utilities debt, the only to assign risk to investors rather than taxpayers, and we have the fastest growing electricity grid in North America.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to question 6. No more preambles to supplementaries, please, starting with Drumheller-Stettler.

2:10 Travel Alberta Executive Expenses

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the tourism minister mocked my concerns over lavish government expenses. Now, no one in the opposition is suggesting that the CEO of Travel Alberta wear coveralls, but we question why someone who is paid \$390,000 a year needs us to rent him a suit. To the minister. Help me out here. We pay bureaucrats exorbitant wages, and you're telling us that taxpayers should dress them as well. Why?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I'll answer that question as best I can. Travel Alberta plays an absolutely vital role in supporting our \$7.8 billion tourism industry. They are an agency that has been used as a model for provincial marketing agencies across Canada, and I'm very proud of the fact that they've won national and international awards. That said, I am very concerned about any suggestion of any possible inappropriate expenditures and yesterday instructed Travel Alberta to conduct a full and complete review of all expenditures to ensure that they comply with our expense disclosure policies.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Minister. Given that Travel Alberta lavishes themselves with thousand-dollar dinners at Canmore restaurants, including paying \$99 for a rib steak, and given that Alberta beef producers know that a \$99 steak is incredibly extravagant and wasteful when expensing to taxpayers,

will the minister establish reasonable policies for expensing these dinners so that average, hard-working Albertans will not be gouged by these officials?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, policies are in place with regard to expense disclosure, and in fact all of those expenses are public because of the expense disclosure policy that was introduced by this government in September of 2012, the most open expense disclosure policy in the country. [interjection] It is the gold standard as a matter of fact.

Mr. Speaker, we are conducting a complete and full review. I expect that if it does uncover any inappropriate expenditures, those will be reconciled and there will be no further ones going forward.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, they are entitled to their entitlements.

Given that we have first-class tickets to Singapore, \$2,000 dinners, \$99 rib steaks, \$390 in alcoholic drinks, and \$150 tux rentals expensed by this \$390,000 employee, will the minister commit to ending these outrageous entitlement policies?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, as I've already committed, Travel Alberta is conducting a full and complete review of all expenditures to make sure that they are in line with expense disclosure policies. I will also commit to supporting the vital work that Travel Alberta does as an award-winning provincial travel-marketing agency, not the agency that these folks want to cut 80 per cent of their budget by, which would decimate the travel industry and the 139,000 jobs we have in this province in tourism.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on, then. Edmonton-South West followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Public Transit Funding

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of the capital region are making unprecedented use of the city's LRT system. As of this past fall over 100,000 people are getting on our trains each day. When the new NAIT station opens in June, it's expected that over 10,000 new daily riders will be added to that total. Furthermore, an average of 97 per cent of park-and-ride spaces for the LRT are occupied by 10 a.m. My constituency is not yet serviced by an LRT, and when space is at a premium, we must park elsewhere. We are in serious danger of overloading the system. Edmontonians were asking last week and are asking today. But why did this take so long, Minister? Why did we not do this before with a specific line . . .

The Speaker: I assume that's to the minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member mention a line item in the budget, so maybe I'll take the first one. It's not often that you will see a line item for a future project that is actually described by the city or one of our municipalities that would appear in the text and full body of the budget, just as there's no line item that says for the taxpayers of Alberta to support the Wildrose caucus, but unfortunately we have got to pay them, too. The line items that do apply to LRT are GreenTRIP, are things like the building Canada fund, are things like MSI, all of which are substantial commitments to the municipalities in our province for their public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First sup.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Transportation. Given the increasing importance of GreenTRIP across our province, I desperately urge you to consider a long-term funding commitment, Minister. Can you give active LRT riders like myself a clear message that you are committed to GreenTRIP across the province?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, GreenTRIP by its very nature is a long-term commitment to sustainable public transit in Alberta. The program was first introduced in 2008, and as Budget 2014 clearly outlines, we have no intention of wavering on that commitment to fully fund GreenTRIP's original budget of \$2 billion by 2020. To date GreenTRIP has provided or approved funding for public transit projects in 15 Alberta municipalities, totalling more than \$1 billion, including \$497 million towards Edmonton's LRT.

The Speaker: Second supplemental, please.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the minister of Treasury Board and Finance: given that many of my constituents depend on the use of the LRT on a daily basis and are inconvenienced at having to commute simply to reach the nearest station and that the next phase of GreenTRIP will focus on expanding to the southeast and not to the southwest, when can we expect additional provincial funding that would assist the city of Edmonton to further expand the LRT system out to areas like mine in southwest Edmonton?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't set the priorities for the city of Edmonton's municipal funding and their infrastructure. The MSI envelope is very, very flexible around the capital. We increased that this year. The GreenTRIP is by application process, as we announced today, and we're expecting that the city of Edmonton will be making an application for the southeast line, which the mayor said was the city's number one priority. I'm aware that this hon. member has been lobbying hard for the southwest, and I know he's also been talking to the mayor quite a bit about moving that up in the priority line. They make their priorities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Shaw, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is no doubt a day of celebration in the city of Edmonton. After seemingly endless rounds of raised hopes, letdowns, and broken promises from this PC government it looks like Edmonton finally got the support it needs for LRT expansion. It was a rocky process, one marked by the usual political manipulation of this government. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: instead of this patchwork of unpredictable and politically motivated grants, why don't you just adopt a stable, long-term funding model like the Wildrose 10-10 plan?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the announcement today of the LRT in Edmonton is evidence if ever you needed it that there is stable, long-term, and substantial commitment to communities and the city of Edmonton specifically.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this PC government promised during the last election to double their

investment in cities through MSI to \$1.6 billion in 2014, doesn't the minister realize that if his government simply kept their word – kept their word – that Edmonton would receive \$152 million annually over and above what they're getting now, allowing them to fully expand their LRT system now and into the future?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the city of Edmonton is completely aligned with the province of Alberta in ensuring that we deliver upon the potential of this great city. I have something right here in my pocket. I have right here an LRT ticket, which is the ticket to the future, and you should get onboard. [interjections] I'll give you mine if you wish, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I suppose there are others who have tickets, and they'll be flashing them. Yes, there we go. Let's remember that the use of props is forbidden in this Assembly.

Move on with your final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the broken promise on doubling the MSI commitment, not to mention the pile of broken promises on things like fixed elections, no debt, balanced budgets, a proper health care inquiry, and promises like building 50 new schools, a certainty to be eventually broken, how can the people in Edmonton have any confidence whatsoever in your promise today that stable LRT funding will be there in the future?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the evidence will be in the delivery of the LRT line over time. I believe that the mayor of Edmonton is fully committed to achieving this goal. He's got to work, of course, with the government of Canada in order to achieve that. The federal government has to match our funding in order to make it happen. We'll all be working together arm in arm to make sure that we deliver the services for the people of Edmonton into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

2:20 Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Over the past several months there's been a growing concern among Alberta parents, teachers, and trustees that the Minister of Education is taking a radical approach to redesigning our provincial curriculum. I've heard comments like: don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Really, Mr. Minister, if this is what you are doing, though you've stated in this House over and over again that we have the best system in the world and that our students rank among the best in international assessments, why are you making changes to the curriculum?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, quite simply to make it even better. It's true that we have one of the best systems in the world, and international tests attest to that. Unlike the opposition, I'm very proud of our system and of our teachers, that make it so great. But it's only because we continually improve and continually change our curriculum that it is so great, and that's what this is about. It's about taking the world's best practices and leading research and taking the good things that we do and then adding in what Albertans like Dr. Tran-Davies have told us they want, what employers want, that they're not getting out of the education system, and working to make a great system even better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. Back to the same minister: can you, Minister of Education, explain what the main objectives of the redesign are so that the parents and the teachers can have more certainty about what the government is really trying to accomplish?

Mr. J. Johnson: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to. Obviously, we need more time than we have in question period, but we can boil this down to three main things. One is that, you know, educators and parents complain that the curriculum is too compact, that there are over 1,400 outcomes, that they can't get through it all, that teachers can't use their creativity, and that they can't drill down on subjects, so we want to make it a little bit more flexible. The other thing we want to do is that we want to put a re-emphasis on the basics, literacy and numeracy. We don't want those just in math and language arts; we want those to weave through all the subject areas. Then, thirdly, we want to respond to employers, who have told us that in the 21st century the soft skills like problem solving, communication skills, and collaboration skills are important and that entrepreneurialism needs to be instilled in the system.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. Again to the same minister. I'm happy to hear some of the things that you've just said. Given that opponents of the redesign use the terms "discovery learning" or "teachers are partners in learning" and "students are self-directed learners," if this is truly true, how do the basics fit into this?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, firstly, I want to respond to the comments on discovery learning and teachers as only the partners in learning. It's absolute rubbish. That's not where Alberta is going. That's not where we are today, and that's not where we're heading. Alberta's teachers will still teach. Students will not be left to discover concepts on their own. Curriculum redesign does not prescribe a method of teaching that will be mandated or used. It's not just about rote memorization. It's not about inquiry-based learning. It's using all the tools in the tool belt to reach every kid.

Electricity Pricing

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the evidence keeps mounting that TransAlta Corporation may in fact have had the full blessing of the province's electricity authorities when it shut down its power plants at peak times to drive up prices. Documents obtained from the Market Surveillance Administrator and from the Alberta Electric System Operator both unequivocally state that economic withholding or, less cryptically, price gouging is simply rational economic behaviour encouraged by the powers that be. To the minister of electricity: were the MSA and the AESO simply implementing government policy when they did this?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing how expert this particular member has become in electricity law. Right now this issue is before the Alberta Utilities Commission. They are the adjudicator responsible to hear this case. For us to offer opinions at this point in time actually compromises consumers, and I would remind this member, including all members of the opposition, that they can be called before the regulator to clarify their comments.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

Mr. Hehr: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Electric System Operator and the Market Surveillance Administrator clearly state in documents that economic withholding, in other words price gouging, is legal in this province. I'm just asking: was this government policy that they were implementing, or were they doing this at their own behest on some Wild West rampage?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To reiterate: are companies in this province allowed to engage in anticompetitive behaviour? Of course not. We are a jurisdiction that cares about consumers. We've been focused on a free, efficient, and openly competitive marketplace that protects consumers. Prices are brought down when we do that. We've added 10,000 megawatts of electricity in the past 16 years here in Alberta. I think we should focus on our strengths and not just focus on undermining the system.

Mr. Hehr: Well, then this question should be fairly easy for the minister to answer. Is it legal for a company to withhold electricity from the market in an effort to raise the prices paid by Albertans on their electricity bills? Price gouging: is that legal in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is asking a question he knows full well that I cannot answer in this House without compromising the independence of the AUC review. Companies in this province are clearly not allowed to participate in anticompetitive behaviour.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order and, hon. leader of the ND opposition, your point of order were both noted at 2:25 p.m.

Let us move on. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Educational Curriculum Redesign (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has embarked on a sweeping overhaul of the kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum across all subjects. Not only has he decided to roll out the changes all at once, something that will put exceptional stress on our teachers and system; he's doing it over two years instead of six. The pace is a disservice to our children, parents, and teachers. To the Minister of Education: will you slow down the breakneck speed of curriculum redesign so we can make sure it's done right?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's an excellent question, and we would absolutely slow it down to make sure it's done right if that's what's required. We're doing this in a different method than we normally do. Normally, we have educators sitting in Edmonton in the Education department working on curriculum one subject at a time for 10 years. That's not good enough anymore. It's not nimble; it's not responsive. This request, this new model, has come from educators. It has come from school boards. They're the ones working on it. They'll develop prototypes. If they're not right, they won't be implemented. So we're

not talking about a broad, radical implementation in 2016. We'll get it right.

Mr. Bilous: I'd say to the minister that that's jumping from one extreme to the other.

Mr. Speaker, given that in a document from Alberta Education we'll be tabling shortly, Suncor and Syncrude are titled key education partners in the development of our kindergarten to grade 3 curriculum and given that K to grade 3 represents an especially formative time in our children's lives, will the minister please explain to the parents of Alberta the benefits oil and gas companies can expect to receive from codeveloping curriculum for their five-year-olds?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's only the NDP that think that there's a small group of Albertans that have a stake in the education system. Everyone, every Albertan, has a stake in the education system in this province, and every corner of Alberta has been invited to participate in consultations like Setting the Direction, like Speak Out, which is a student engagement, like Inspiring Education. We take all that input, and we want employers, we want libraries, we want parents, we want grandparents, we want everybody to have a voice in the curriculum redesign as well.

Mr. Bilous: That's pretty rich, Minister, considering there's a short list of who's invited, and it's not every Albertan.

Given that oil and gas companies have no business in curriculum development of kindergarten to grade 3 and given that oil and gas companies have been elevated to the same status as teachers in our classrooms, will the minister admit that he thinks teachers might get in the way of his vision for selling out classrooms to the highest corporate bidder?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, just a ridiculous comment. You know, I'd just refer back to: we want every corner of the province involved in this. The oil and gas industry is a strong piece of our economy. What part are they involved in in the grades 1 to 3 classrooms? I can't specifically answer that question, but in general we want all the business community paying attention to and engaged in the education system just like Dr. Tran-Davies is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

2:30

Flood Recovery and Mitigation

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been patient with the government on the response to the flood, but like my constituents, my patience is wearing very thin. I have so many questions to ask because the government response has been so muddled. For instance, I note that the budget mentioned new flood mapping. Finally. We have said all along that new flood mapping is needed because the maps are wrong, and it is causing the government to waste money that could be better spent elsewhere. Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs halt the foolishly expensive policy of demolishing safe neighbourhoods like Beachwood until he gets accurate flood maps of High River?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, this was, we all know, the largest, most difficult natural disaster in Canadian history, and I have to say that actually trying to politicize issues like this is inappropriate and not acceptable.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the flood maps that are being worked on will demonstrate, if anything, that we're probably working within the appropriate parameters and perhaps need to be

more concerned about wider parameters on flood plains. We're just trying to ensure at every step that we protect Albertans and that we protect their property for the future.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Pat George is one of the few lucky residents in High River whose home didn't flood during the worst floods in our history, but the flawed maps say that his home falls in a floodway, and he is being pressured to accept the government buyout and relocate. The government won't pay him enough to replace his home in High River. Pat doesn't want to leave. Both High River town council and Pat have pleaded with the government to reconsider. Will the minister admit that his maps are wrong and let Pat George stay in his home?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, should there be any specific cases, I am happy to take them up. What I can tell you is that the government of Alberta has taken every responsible step to ensure that Albertans who were affected by the flood have all the choices that we can possibly provide to them so that they can make those decisions, take a look at what their options are in the future, and make those decisions as soon as they possibly can, with more options such as in the case that this member has mentioned.

Ms Smith: That's nonsense. It's been nine months since the floods, and I'm sad to say that there are too many of my constituents and business owners who are still waiting for even basic rebuilding assistance.

Frankly, the government's disaster recovery program contractor, LandLink, is an incompetent train wreck. They have been slow, unresponsive, uncompassionate, and unhelpful. Will the minister address this dysfunction by firing this failed contractor and creating a disaster recovery program that actually works?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, on this case it is quite clear to me that the contractor has been helpful to the province of Alberta for a long period of time, but that contract comes to an end at the end of this month. They will not be part of any future disaster recovery program in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Grain Rail Transportation Backlog

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2013 one of the largest crops on record was harvested, but farmers across western Canada are experiencing railway and port delays transporting grain. Grain companies are being forced to reduce crop prices because they cannot guarantee delivery to the ports. On Friday the federal government announced that they would take measures to move more grain through the transportation backlog. To the minister of agriculture: can you clarify what some of these measures are and tell us if you support them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that is very important to our producers, and I know it's important to this hon. member. She's been very vocal to me. I know that she and her family have been attempting to move their grain, as many other Alberta producers have.

This is federal jurisdiction, and Alberta has been on record for years wanting some action taken in order to make sure that grain moves in a timely manner. We saw on Friday the federal government take an immediate step, which was an order in council

requiring minimum grain movement, ramping up over a period of four weeks, on pain of \$100,000-a-day penalties.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the grain backlog has negatively affected many producers in Alberta, can you explain the impact that these changes will have on the agricultural industry and why it is important that we act quickly?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that across the prairies over 90 per cent capacity is now kind of the norm in grain elevators while at the same time we're at all-time lows at the terminals at the ports on the west coast, with at last count some 55 ships sitting offshore waiting, so it's a serious problem. The measures that were announced on Friday were short-term measures.

Also, very significantly, though, the federal government announced that they are going to be looking at legislation. That's a longer term fix, and we're fully engaged in that discussion.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you. To the Minister of Transportation. Alberta is an exporting province. How do you think this will affect the movement of other commodities as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank this hon. member for her question and for how hard she works for her constituents, in particular her grain producers.

I know as well as anyone how important it is for Alberta farmers to be able to move their harvest to global markets, and I've spent a lot of time recently meeting with producers, rail companies, and other stakeholders to address this issue. I'll continue to work closely with my cabinet colleagues and federal counterparts on a solution that will move Alberta agricultural producers' products by rail quickly and efficiently.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in November the Minister of Health said that his government was actively exploring options to move interfacility transfers outside of emergency services so that they weren't tying up local rural ambulance services. In February he put out a release once again stating that his government was actively exploring options to move interfacility transfers outside the EMS. Minister, it's March, and this issue puts patient risk every day onto residents in my constituency. When and how will this problem be finally resolved?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. In fact, we know that today about 30 per cent of all ambulance calls in the province are for interfacility transfer. In many cases these involve patients in continuing care facilities or even at home being transferred for routine appointments. There are a number of issues on the EMS front that we have been dealing with. This is a major initiative, and the hon. Associate Minister – Public Safety is actively engaged in this file as well. We are continuing to work on the issue, and when we have something major to announce in this realm, we will.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First sup.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. Given that the government recently acquired a new facility where ambulance units have been noticed in the south of Calgary, in a prime retail location along Macleod Trail at a former car dealership, can the minister describe what the purpose of this new facility is, what it cost, and what improvements this will offer to the EMS system in southern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Working in part of that system and out of that very facility, the discussions have been ongoing for years. Just to address those issues of rural Alberta getting ambulances back to their base, when an ambulance goes down and needs a piece of equipment, it's better to house it out of a southern positioning facility, and that's what they've done. They've brought equipment and people to fix that equipment so that these ambulances can get back into their community. It's a good thing. It's cost-effective. It gets us out of fire halls and gets us back where EMS work can be done, consolidated, and better patient care can take place.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. Considering that the EMS personnel are informing me that despite the new Calgary facility being apparently in place, a lack of vehicles and equipment in southern Alberta remains as a continuing issue, what new options is the minister exploring to address this ongoing problem, then?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, as you can imagine, our province is growing very quickly, not to mention that there's a person becoming a senior every 15 minutes. They come with complex needs, particularly in rural Alberta. As we grow, we need to have facilities in place. We need to have people in place. We're looking at every option. We know how important it is. This is a world-class system that I think is going to be better. We're exploring options that are going to increase our clinical capacity to care for these people in seniors' homes, perhaps family care clinics. This is very complex, and we're working with all the stakeholders to make sure that happens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has several grants and initiatives to provide infrastructure funding to municipalities. However, it is sometimes difficult for municipalities to plan for long-term projects as this funding must be applied for on a year-to-year basis. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the government's plan to help municipalities with long-term infrastructure planning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we all know that some of these large projects, for example the LRT in Edmonton, on which we made a major announcement today in collaboration with the city of Edmonton, require long-term commitments. These municipalities require some heads-up in terms of how they can use their resources, and that's what you saw today. It was an exceptional commitment on the part of the province to work with the city of Edmonton to ensure that the citizens of Edmonton are well

served long into the future. We have a reliable, predictable set of funding mechanisms, including the MSI, in order to provide that support.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the municipalities are facing infrastructure challenges, do we have a plan to improve the funding model for municipalities, particularly in major centres such as Edmonton and Calgary?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to work not just with the large centres but with all other municipalities as well, with 347 communities. We have the GreenTRIP transit incentives; we have policing grants; we have social supports; we have the municipal sustainability initiative, both operating and capital; and, in addition, the Alberta community partnership this year, which is a program designed to enable and to support municipalities that wish to work together, which is an important part of the Alberta value system that we all have grown up with.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister: given that a stable funding structure is crucial to providing essential local services, what will the government do to ensure that the municipalities receive the funding they need despite fluctuating municipal tax revenues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, we're providing nearly \$2 billion directly to municipalities across the province. We've also added \$150 million into the municipal sustainability initiative over three years as well as an additional \$20 million to the Alberta community partnership to fund regional initiatives. These are substantial commitments from the government of Alberta to the municipalities of this province to help ensure that they are well supported in delivering these very important services to all Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today.

In 30 seconds from now the Clerk will announce the next section of our proceedings.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I believe you have the final member's statement. Please proceed.

Lyme Disease

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked the Minister of Health a number of questions about the availability of testing and treatment for Albertans with Lyme disease. Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne disease in North America and can result in serious and debilitating symptoms. Left untreated, heart and muscle damage and even meningitis can result. These are serious symptoms of a serious disease that deserves a serious response from this government.

In my response to questions last week the Health minister assured that both he and the government understand the severity of Lyme disease and the importance of timely treatment. It was good to hear this from the minister. However, this is not reflected in patient experiences. I have a number of constituents with heart-breaking stories of roadblocks not only in trying to get treatment

for Lyme disease but even in accessing the two-stage diagnostic testing for Lyme disease.

One constituent of mine wrote to me about her life changing overnight in November of 2012, when she woke up to intense vibration in her chest and head. Blood tests, X-rays, ultrasound: when all of these tests came back negative, doctors began to suspect it was all in her head. She was prescribed antipsychotics and anti-anxiety medication and sent on her way, none of which helped with her debilitating symptoms. When a family member familiar with Lyme disease suggested she get tested, she found the only option was to pay \$2,000 for private testing in the U.S., a test that confirmed it was, in fact, Lyme disease. Despite that diagnosis, she has struggled to receive treatment here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on with horror stories from people who have written about problems accessing health care when they join the unfortunate club of those afflicted by uncommon or rare diseases. Despite the minister's assurances that Lyme disease treatment and testing is a priority, there are dozens of Albertans who would beg to differ.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and table the appropriate number of copies of a letter that I've received from some constituents. The letter is accompanied by a couple hundred signatures. They're concerned that, as the director of Alberta health care in the community of La Crête informed them, cuts to their long-term care are both imminent and definite. I will take it up with the minister, but I table this letter as a plea to Alberta Health Services to stop dropping these bombs in my rural communities and start working, co-operating, and consulting with the community so we can move ahead together and provide equitable health care access.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will do Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's tabling as well. The first one I have here is the first 50 of more than 4,000 postcards our office has received asking the PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta.

The second tabling I have today is an appropriate number of copies of a document from Alberta Education entitled Alberta Education's Curriculum Development Prototyping Partners. This document shows that companies like Syncrude and Suncor are considered key education partners and stakeholders in the development of curriculum for those as young as K to 3.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you're aware, in today's question period I referenced documents from the Alberta Electric System Operator that were given out December 2013 in a meeting with members of that organization, the Market Surveillance Administrator, and players in the marketplace. It clearly shows that the AESO understood that there were unilateral exercises of market power in its offered behaviour enforcement guidelines and that it essentially allows for economic withholding

to be practised in this province. In my view, a lot of that amounts to, simply, market manipulation. It's a very enlightening document. I'd encourage everyone to take a look at it as it seems to indicate a lot of what's going on here in the marketplace.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies, too, to table of the information regarding my comments today in the Legislature. For your interest it also includes a picture of the \$99 rib steak that's available to you should you attend the Canmore facility.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? I'm sorry. Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, did I miss you? Yes, I did. My apologies. Please proceed.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the letter of support from Lethbridge county regarding my Bill 201.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, will you then allow me, please, to table a letter from the École Innisfail middle school? You may recall that yesterday we had a bit of a set-to here during question period, and I indicated that a letter had been circulated to all of you. In fact, the letter was written by this school to all elected representatives of Alberta. I spoke with the principal today and obtained permission from him to table this letter and let everyone see it, to make sure everybody got it. So it's going out to you. In this letter, among other things, they comment on their disappointment with the behaviour and language used in this Assembly on a particular day in November and state that they will not bring their students back into session. I'll table that letter now.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Mr. Zwodzesky, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, procedural letter 2014, Second Session, 28th Legislature, dated February 11, 2014, from Hon. Mr. Zwodzesky, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, to all Members of the Legislative Assembly, referenced by the Speaker in the Assembly on March 10, 2014.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We're going to move over to points of order, and I think we have three to be heard. Let me just get my list here. I think the first one was Airdrie, who rose at 2:03 p.m. Let's do that one first, and then we'll go elsewhere.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Well, I have two. One could technically be a point of privilege, but it's a point of order. Then the other one is a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker. I'll deal with the point of order first, from 2:03.

The Speaker: Well, a point of privilege trumps a point of order. Strictly speaking, we should go to the point of privilege first. I see that the leader of the ND opposition has that same point. Since you were up first, let's hear your point of privilege, then, and if it mirrors the other one, we'll hear a word or two from him as well.

Let's go with Airdrie, please.

Mr. Anderson: You know what? I will cede the floor to the Zen master from the NDP. He can go first on the point of privilege.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition on a purported point of privilege.

Mr. Mason: With your permission, Mr. Speaker – and thank you to the hon. member – I’m rising on a point of privilege directed against the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy. I have a number of citations. I don’t have the Blues, but I distinctly recollect the hon. associate minister suggesting that if members of the opposition weren’t careful, they could be called before the regulator to clarify their comments. This was part of her argument that she can’t answer questions about electricity price manipulation or pricing in the province because of some ongoing hearings with respect to a particular case involving TransAlta.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that constitutes a threat, and under section 93 of *Beauchesne’s* – I’m just turning to it now – it says, “It is generally accepted that any threat, or attempt to influence the vote of, or actions of a Member, is breach of privilege.” That is the first thing.

Secondly, just as a matter of fact, no member can be compelled to appear in a court or by extension, I would argue, can be compelled to appear at any regulatory hearing. That is something, perhaps, the associate . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, could I just interrupt momentarily? Do you wish to argue this point right now or just give notice of it so that you can have the benefit of the Blues and better prepare yourself?

Mr. Mason: I think I can go now.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Mason: If that’s your wish, we can come back tomorrow.

The Speaker: Well, it’s your call, not mine. I’m just saying that the benefit of the Blues might help.

Mr. Mason: Perhaps the hon. member would like some time to prepare as well.

The Speaker: Well, I don’t know if anybody knows exactly, verbatim, what was said, what wasn’t said, so you might want the benefit of the Blues. It’s your choice. What is your answer?

Mr. Mason: You don’t have the Blues, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I can’t get into a debate on this. I have Blues for one section, at 2:23, but I don’t know if that’s what you were referring to.

Mr. Mason: On your advice – and I appreciate it very much, Mr. Speaker – I will simply, then, give notice, and I will prepared tomorrow to bring this forward, okay?

The Speaker: Thank you very much. That notice has been noted.

We will move back to Airdrie. You had a question of order, I think, on the Minister of Education.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I had a question of privilege, but I think I will let the hon. leader of the NDP handle that tomorrow, and I’ll speak to it at that point. It was about the exact same statement.

I do have the point of order. Would you like me to move to that, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: We could go to your point of order right now, that was raised at 2:03, I think. The first one, in other words.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: All right. To the point of order. Again, I don’t want to burden the time of this House with a point of privilege, but this could fall under that. I will just use Standing Order 23:

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

This is in regard to a question that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View asked. The question to the Minister of Education was: “Will the minister, not his deputy minister, not his [political staff but the minister] commit to sitting down and meeting with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies and her team of experts today as they have been asking him to for months?” The Minister of Education replied that this member well knows that they have met with this individual, Dr. Tran-Davies, several times. Three times, I think he said.

This statement was false. That has not occurred. The minister should be ashamed to insinuate in response to this question that he has met with Dr. Tran-Davies. It just has not occurred. I don’t know if they’re meeting right now or not. I mean, we can have different views of the facts on many different things, Mr. Speaker, but it’s very difficult when a minister of the Crown gets up and in front of everybody, on television and in this Assembly and so forth, makes a statement that is patently false. It’s hard to have a really good dialogue, and I would say that, you know, as much as banter might be offensive to the school kids, flat-out dishonesty is probably more offensive.

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, we could call a point of order if we’re going to toss threats around on the point of order there because the statement that member made is false if you listen to what he said. The minister did not say: I have met with Dr. Tran-Davies three times. He said, “We have met . . .” “We” could be the government of Alberta, or “we” could be the department, which in this case is actually the case. She has met with department staff, she has met with the deputy minister, and she has met with the chief of staff. That has nothing to do with the question that the hon. member asked in the first place. This opposition party can’t get used to the fact that this is question period, not answer period.

The minister said “we” – the minister said “we” – and that is a statement of truth. If anybody should withdraw remarks, it’s that hon. member for calling the minister a liar, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, unfortunately, I don’t have the Blues at hand, and I don’t think anyone else does, so I’m going to simply accept both sides of this argument. There are frequently opportunities here for members to disagree on items. Now we have some clarification of the word “we,” and we all understand how “we” can be used in the collective sense, in the plural sense, so the points have been aired, and they have been clarified on both sides.

We’re going to now move on. I believe that according to Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine is now concluded.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 5
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014.

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014, will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period of April 1, 2014, to May 15, 2014, inclusive.

It is anticipated that funding authority for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, will be provided before that date. The required funding authority for the full year is detailed in the 2014-15 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on March 6, 2014. These interim supply amounts reflect both the anticipated date of full supply and the fact that many payments are monthly. Other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year.

The act would provide spending authority for the following amounts: \$20.9 million for the Legislative Assembly and \$5.4 billion in operational, \$1.6 billion in capital investment, and \$293.8 million in financial transactions for the government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today in response to the government's budget, the appropriation bill, Bill 5. I have to say . . .

Mr. Anderson: No.

Ms Smith: Oh. Wasn't I supposed to . . .

Mr. Anderson: This is budget response, right? Are we still on Bill 5? Never mind. Sorry. Premature.

The Speaker: I believe the hon. Minister of Finance moved Bill 5.

Mr. Horner: I moved second reading of Bill 5.

The Speaker: Second reading of Bill 5. So is there a change in your batting order, opposition?

Okay. Let's hear from the hon. Member for Airdrie.

3:00

Mr. Anderson: Wrong bill here.

I want to rise very briefly on Bill 5 because, obviously, it is related to our budget response, and I don't want to be repeating myself. Bill 5, of course, is an interim supply bill, where we have to – the budget won't be passed by March 31. The government still needs money to keep the lights on and do the things that government does on a day-to-day basis, and they need to do so before Budget '14 is passed. So here we are, and we do this. We did this last year as well. We generally didn't do this before, but this is something we did last year as well. What it speaks to, Mr. Speaker, is a bit of broken system in this regard. We shouldn't do

this. This is really bad practice. We should have the budget passed by March 31 every year. That should be how it works. Under the standing orders, generally, we're supposed to come back in the second week of February, which would allow a budget to be introduced and most likely be passed by March 31. If that's not enough time, we should move it up another week or two.

The point is that the people of Alberta pay everyone in this Assembly a six-figure salary to do a job, and they expect the folks in here to do a job competently. One of those things would be to pass a budget on time. The problem with doing this sort of interim supply, where we have to fund a month of operations or two months of operations while we wait, is that we don't get to properly debate everything that's in that interim supply bill. It's almost a presumption that we'll be passing Budget 2014 without even debating Budget 2014.

Now, I'm not saying that's illegal or against the practices of the Legislature or hasn't been done anywhere else or anything like that, but what I am saying is that it's bad practice. Competent governments are able to get things done by a proper deadline, by the deadline that the people expect, and the people do not expect us to be approving billions and billions of operational and capital spending right now in a three-line document entitled Bill 5, because the government couldn't come to work in time to pass the budget properly before March 31. That's not the right way to do things.

We hope that the government will get its act together. Hope springs eternal, Mr. Speaker. Next year we can do one less bill in this Assembly and just have the budget introduced in early February, pass it by the end of March, and on April 1 the money will flow accordingly. That would be the proper way to do it.

Now, there are many problems with the allocations in this budget, and we will talk about that in our response to the budget speech so that we're not duplicating our words. But in our suggestions for the government that we give in our budget responses, the Leader of the Opposition and myself as Finance critic hope that whatever we say there would apply to this Bill 5 if we had the time to do it twice.

With that, I will move to adjourn debate on Bill 5.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

11. Mr. Horner moved:
 Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 6: Mr. Wilson]

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start again. I'm pleased to stand and respond to the government's budget, released last Thursday. I have to tell you that when it first came out, we were very surprised. We thought that the government had a historic opportunity to actually do the right thing and get back into a real, full, consolidated budget balance. And why wouldn't we have thought that? They are going to have record revenues this year. Even when you look at last year's revenues, it looks like on paper they had record revenues, but it doesn't account for one-time funding that came in from the federal government for flood mitigation.

We are going to have record revenues this year and an additional billion dollars worth of transfers from the federal government

for the health transfer because of the change in formula. There would have been some very simple things the government could have done to get into a full, consolidated budget surplus if they had just actually kept the commitment that was mentioned in the throne speech to increase year-over-year spending by less than the rate of inflation and population growth. They weren't able to do that, not when you include the additional capital dollars, of course, that the government doesn't like to include in any of its consolidated statements. If you include not only the operational spending but also the increase in capital spending, they didn't manage to keep year-over-year spending increases under inflation plus population growth.

If they'd just done a couple of simple things like stretching out the capital plan an extra year or two so that they could actually build at a pace that industry could keep up with and that we could actually afford, if they'd cut wasteful spending – and we have hundreds of millions of dollars of identified wasteful spending in our budget recommendations – they could have very easily been able to get back into a true consolidated budget surplus. We were a bit worried they were actually going to do that, but they never fail to surprise. When they have the opportunity to do the right thing, they so often do the wrong thing, and in this case they did exactly that with this budget.

The fact that we've got record revenues at a time when the government has chosen also to take out record levels of debt is, in my opinion, breaking our commitment to be responsible for our future generations of taxpayers. Future generations of taxpayers are going to be saddled with debt for no reason. You look at the state of the economy. The government goes back and forth bragging about being in debt and then also bragging about how our economy is the fastest growing and the strongest in the entire country.

If you look at the report that came out last week talking about where job growth is being driven, it's being driven from this province, a hundred thousand new jobs, the vast, vast majority of them being driven in Alberta. Those are high-paying jobs, which means they generate a lot of personal income taxes. The companies employing those folks generate a lot of corporate income taxes. It's the reason why we continue to see our tax revenues go up.

We have a level of resource revenues that consistently is high, higher than any other province enjoys. This year \$9.2 billion is what is going to be suggested for our resource revenue. It may even come in higher than that. Yet we have a government that is still going to be taking out \$5 billion worth of debt this year. It is going to continue growing the level of debt year after year after year. In its three-year budget plan there is actually no projection over the next three years of a year in which they're actually going to run a real, full consolidated budget surplus. By the 2015 Budget we are going to have \$18 billion worth of debt. By the 2016 Budget we are going to have \$21 billion worth of debt.

We also have to ask the question: what does next year hold? Last year in their budget projections we were only supposed to be at \$17 billion of debt by the time we go into the next election. Already we're looking at having that increased by a billion dollars. It's clearly a government where it doesn't matter how much additional revenue they get. They are so committed to going into debt that they are going to go into debt no matter what.

Why is debt bad? They're spending an awful lot of time talking about why they think debt is good, but I can tell you why government debt is bad. It is government's job to invest in capital infrastructure. This is not an add-on that you do if you happen to have money left over. It's not: gee, we spent so much money on operation that we ran out of money to be able to spend money on

capital. This is core government business to invest in capital infrastructure. We have a government now that seems to be reluctant to do proper budgeting to allow for the fact that they have to have capital built and baked right into their consolidated budget amount and instead are trying to convince Albertans that somehow capital is different, that it can be treated as a separate budget, a separate line item.

I have to question whether or not this government has a serious commitment to pay it back. The Finance minister often talks about how it's like a mortgage. It is absolutely not like a mortgage. On a mortgage every single year you're paying a portion of finance charges and a portion of principal so that every single year it ends up getting paid down, year after year after year. Ultimately, you're ending up paying more on principal than you are on interest, and it gets paid off. There is no plan in this budget or next year or the year after that to pay off this level of debt. It is not one time. When a family takes out a mortgage for a home, it is a one-time level of debt that they take out. It goes out over time with a plan to pay it off. But, importantly, when a family takes out a mortgage to buy a house, the house is often an appreciating asset. It goes up in value so that at any point they can sell it to be able to pay off the debt, or at the end of their retirement, when it's paid off, it becomes one of their principal assets to fund their retirement.

3:10

The problem when politicians take out debt is that they are doing it to seek votes, and they are not going to be the ones who are going to be around to have to pay it back, especially when you look at the plan that they've put forward. They're putting aside so little money to actually pay this debt when it comes due that it is going to be left to future generations of taxpayers, not only kids and grandkids but great-grandkids and great-great-grandkids, if this government continues to get elected and its plan falls into place.

The argument that because interest rates are low, the government should borrow falls apart when there is no debt repayment plan. What happens, as we've seen this year, when debt comes up for renewal and you don't have the money set aside to repay it, you have to then reissue the bonds at whatever the prevailing interest rate is of the day. We know that this government has taken out debts for all sorts of different lengths of time: some 30 year, some 20 year, some five, some 10. Because they're not putting aside enough money to actually be able to pay off the debt when it comes due, we are left open to not knowing what our future interest payments are going to be. We are left not knowing how much in total we're going to pay in interest rates. Again, that makes it unlike a mortgage. In a mortgage people typically take it out for a fixed term, pay it off over time. The government does not have a plan to do that.

The other question I would have to ask. The Finance minister gives the impression that we're making this choice that if we didn't take out the debt, then we'd have to take it out of our savings, and it's our savings that are generating all of this additional investment income. He's implying that we're putting aside an equal amount of money in our savings to be able to pay off the debt that they're taking out, but that's simply not true, Mr. Speaker. There has never ever been any indication that our heritage savings assets would ever be liquidated to pay off the debt, so let's be frank that the heritage savings trust funds are not assets by which we should offset that debt.

It's also not correct to say that the sustainability fund is money set aside to be able to pay off that debt. That's simply not accurate as well. We know what the sustainability fund is for. It's to be able to stabilize our revenues in a period where we have a down-

turn in our resource revenues. There's no one contemplating that we would liquidate our sustainability fund to pay off that debt. So what dollar figure are we looking at to be able to offset that debt? It's \$34 million that was put away this year. They're adding about \$100 million to it next year, but we're ballooning our amount owing to \$22 billion by the time we get to 2016.

I have to ask the government a question. If they have such confidence in the market, are any of them taking out a mortgage on their homes so that they can invest in the stock market because they're going to earn higher earnings on their investments than they're paying on their mortgage payment? That's what they're suggesting real families do. Real families, responsible families don't do that, but that's exactly what the government is suggesting that we do.

They have such a short memory. Such a short memory. Back in 2009 – they may forget, but let me remind them – we had a market crash, and the heritage savings trust fund actually lost \$2 billion. So you can't just be like a gambler and only trumpet your winnings; you have to look at your investment returns over a long enough period of time and factor in some of your losses as well. The fact that they've taken us down this path, where they're essentially borrowing money to play the market: that isn't what people elect a government to do. They elect a government to responsibly manage the tax dollars that they get in, the revenues that they get in. I think that this strategy is flawed from the start, and I hope I'm wrong. I'm hoping that they'll be able to maintain their market returns, but I have to say that history has not demonstrated that we're able to get double-digit returns consistently every year, as the Finance minister seems to suggest.

The other thing I would remind you, Mr. Speaker, is that up until this point we have managed to build infrastructure debt free for about 20 years. I know that there's a mythology that has been created around how much capital infrastructure dollars were being spent in the Klein years. Klein only had a few years where he reduced spending and maintained a very reasonable and slow rate of growth for a period of time, but he started reinvesting in infrastructure spending. It wasn't a choice between building nothing and borrowing. He was actually able to do it all. He was able to maintain operating surpluses plus invest in capital, plus run real surpluses, which he was able to set aside in the sustainability fund. Let's remember that the sustainability fund got to \$17 billion by 2006, plus the debt was paid off. Whatever amount was remaining was set aside in the debt repayment fund to be able to pay off when it came due. Now, six short years later, we have a complete reversal of fortunes.

I would remind the members opposite that they used to believe exactly what I'm talking about right now. Their leader used to believe exactly what I'm talking about right now. With a couple of quotes – I mean, I'm assuming that some folks voted for her and her leadership because of some of the things she said at the time. She said – and I believe this – that “it's entirely possible for us to continue to provide the quality of life that we as Albertans have without going into debt, and I am committed to that.” November 8, 2011, PC leadership. She also said, shortly after becoming Premier, in this Legislature in her maiden speech as Premier: “Debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments. Debt has proven the death of countless dreams.” October 24, 2011, *Hansard*.

Mr. Anderson: It's just operational.

Ms Smith: She didn't say that it was just operational. She didn't say that we just have to run operational surpluses and that all the

debt that we take out to build capital doesn't really count. That's not what that quote actually said.

The fact that we have seen a complete reversal two years after the fact, even after a general election where these kinds of statements were made all through the general election, I have to wonder how it is that the Premier and the Finance minister and all the folks on the other side feel they actually have a mandate to do this. I certainly don't believe that they do have a mandate to do this.

Why did the Premier say that debt has proven the death of countless dreams? Why did she say that debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments? If you only had to worry about the principal, maybe you could make the argument that debt was manageable. If you didn't have to worry about fluctuating interest rates and all those finance charges, you might be able to make an argument that you could manage your levels of debt. But it's the interest payments that are the killer. It is the interest payments that are the death of countless dreams.

Now, let's talk about what our interest payments are going to be by the time we get to the next election: \$820 million in finance charges. That's a big number to try to wrap our heads around, \$820 million buying absolutely nothing. That doesn't buy a nurse or a teacher or a doctor or a corrections worker or a social worker. It doesn't pay for supports for persons with developmental disabilities. It doesn't pay to support our seniors. It is money that is simply going to bankers to finance the outstanding debt. We get nothing for it.

How does that compare with the cost of multiple ministries? Well, I have to tell you that to get an idea of just how big \$820 million worth of interest charges is, all of the operations of our Energy department are \$701 million in a budget year. All of the operations of our Infrastructure department, our operational side, are \$664 million; the entire operations of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, \$559 million in a year; Municipal Affairs, our entire operations there, \$485 million. We can run the Service Alberta department for \$286 million; Aboriginal Relations, \$201 million; Tourism, \$193 million; Culture, \$177 million; the Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour department, \$167 million; Executive Council, the Premier's office, \$51 million; International and Intergovernmental Relations, \$39 million.

We have 11 ministries that operate on a budget on an annual basis that is lower than the \$820 million in finance charges that we are going to have to pay every single year for at least 30 years. We project that it's more like 70 years, and if they only put aside a hundred million dollars per year, as they are in this year's budget, it'll take over 200 years for them to actually pay back that level of debt. We will be paying those interest charges year after year after year after year, diverting money away from the things that really matter to Albertans. That is why debt is a trap that has caught so many struggling governments, and that is why Alberta should continue to strive to be debt free, and it would under a Wildrose government.

The other problem that we have with the budget is a problem that's been raised by the Auditor General. It's even actually been raised by the former Finance minister. Because we do not have a true consolidated budget – we have three separate budgets – it's almost impossible to actually figure out what the true shortfall really is.

It isn't any victory for them to claim an operating surplus. An operating surplus is not something that has ever been difficult for this government to do in the last 20 years. Even with Premier Stelmach, who had the misfortune of having a year where we had a global financial meltdown at a time when we also had a decline in natural gas prices, even in the year that he was Premier, the

worst that they did on the operational side was to have a \$59 million operational deficit. So to do some fancy footwork and change the definition of surplus and then try to claim that it's some great victory: I'm sorry; Albertans are not buying it.

3:20

The question that we have that is really peculiar, though, about what this government is now trying to sell us, is the pretense that they do have a consolidated surplus. They claim to have a consolidated surplus at the same time as they're borrowing \$5 billion. Now, Albertans are no dummies; they've been asking this question. They've been asking it of me in our office; they've been asking it on all of the social media pages: how come you can have a surplus but also have \$5 billion worth of new debt? The answer to that is quite simple. You don't really have a surplus. It's smoke and mirrors. It's a shell game. It's not real. That, I think, is what Albertans are saying loud and clear, and I think it also is diminishing the trust that they have in this government.

If the government wants to make the case about why we should go into debt, then they should actually be straight with Albertans about the level of the consolidated deficit. I have to tell you that it's become a bit of a parlour game every year, where you've got multiple different organizations trying to figure out what the actual shortfall is. We've calculated it out at about \$2.7 billion. The Canadian Taxpayers' Federation I think has calculated it out somewhere closer to \$4 billion. So safe to say that we have a shortfall this year of between \$2 billion and \$4 billion. And who knows? Depending on how energy prices go, it could be more; it could be less. The point is that we need to have a full, complete consolidated set of books so that we have the answer to this question.

I don't really care about comparing our practices to other provinces who have bad practices as well. We should be comparing our practices to our own best practices. The Finance minister I think was inaccurate when he suggested that Alberta had always done its books this way. I think that if you go back to the early days, when Premier Klein and Finance minister Jim Dinning came in, one of their goals was to have a single consolidated set of books. What is the total revenue coming in, what are the total expenses going out, and what's the difference? Unless you know how much your shortfall is, you are never ever going to plot a track to be able to get back into genuine surplus. This government used to know that, but it seems like they've forgotten the lessons over the last 20 years.

The other issue and concern that we have is with the heritage fund and the way in which the government is now, through Bill 1, changing to be able to allow them to skirt around the policy that they put in place last year. We were actually quite enthusiastic about their policy last year because it looked as though what they were trying to do was create a situation where the funds that are generated from the heritage fund would stay invested in that fund so that it could grow over time.

Now with Bill 1 this year they're actually carving out a number of different accounts so that they can create revenue streams from those accounts to be able to siphon off dollars that were supposed to be invested in the fund. Over the next 10 years we're going to see \$2 billion worth of interest income siphoned off in that way, which I think is, again, some more smoke and mirrors. I don't think that that was the intention of what the bill was last year that would have reinvested those dollars in the account. We're very disappointed that the government isn't doing it the way we think you can do it appropriately. We have no objection to endowment funds, but you have to do it the right way. You have to do it with real surpluses.

Let's remember where the heritage savings trust fund would have been if the government had actually kept to the commitment of keeping those investment dollars reinvested in the fund. We now have in that fund on a per capita basis fewer dollars than when the first deposit was made in 1976. If the government had simply kept with the plan of reinvesting that investment income, it would be worth \$165 billion today. Now, imagine if AIMCo had had the success of investing at 11 per cent. If they had had \$165 billion in that account, we would be looking at over \$16 billion in additional investment income that could go to fund the programs and services that Albertans care about. That was a huge lost opportunity. Unfortunately, by going down the same track of finding a new way to siphon off that investment income, the government is ensuring that we won't be able to reach that target going forward over the next 20 or 30 years.

What we would have liked to have seen is the government get back into real surplus. Our plan is to put 50 per cent of those surpluses in this heritage savings trust fund and keep that investment income growing in the fund until it gets to a point where it surpasses the amount that we're generating through oil and gas revenues so that we can wean ourselves off our reliance on oil and gas. I think that that's what Albertans want to see. Unfortunately, they did not see it in this budget. There was a better way to do it, but once again I think it's a missed opportunity on the part of the government.

I have mentioned a couple of our Wildrose recommendations for Budget 2014, and I'll go through a few of those now because I think that to understand why I'm disappointed with the budget today, we have to see the kinds of things that we think were very simple wins that would have set the right tone in government, would have set the right tone for our public service, and I think would have gone a long way towards helping us find the efficiencies that we need to be able to maintain surpluses in the long run.

We have 16 recommendations, Mr. Speaker, and I can table this document later so that it's on file. We would eliminate all associate minister positions and reduce the number of ministries to 16. We'd roll back MLA salaries. We'd cut cabinet minister pay. We'd cut the size of the Public Affairs Bureau in half and prohibit its partisan activities. We'd cap bonuses for public services. We'd limit their severance packages. We'd halt unnecessary extras to the new MLA offices in the federal building; I noticed that the cost overruns continue to go on in the federal building. We'd cap annual travel costs for the Premier, ministers, MLAs, and staff. We would end corporate welfare. We would reduce the cost of government and the AHS bureaucracy while protecting front-line services and positions. We would implement our 10-year, debt-free capital plan. We'd implement a rolling three-year, zero-based budgeting program. We would increase resources to the Auditor General's office and focus on value-for-money audits. We'd establish a waste-buster program protected by whistle-blower legislation, true protection under whistle-blower legislation. Once we get into savings, we would use that to pay down the Redford debt, and we would implement the Wildrose balanced budget and savings plan.

So let's talk about some of the ways in which this budget falls short. I've already mentioned that they did not actually live up to their commitment to keep the spending in line with inflation plus population growth. They're exceeding them. That's always what's gotten us into trouble. When the government increases spending above inflation plus population growth and it ends up outstripping the growth in our revenues, that's what causes our shortfalls. The way to be able to get back into long-term, sustainable surpluses is

by limiting year-over-year increases so that our revenues grow faster.

I think that what we often see and expect to see is that leadership really should begin from the top. If you want to be able to create a culture in the administration that you actually care about the dollars and cents, you actually have to see the ministers caring about dollars and cents themselves. Now, the media has already talked about the increases in the Premier's office, an additional \$1.2 million, including \$300,000 for additional letter writers. We already know about her expensive travel costs, but I don't see any indication that that is going to change.

Let's look at some of the other ministries where we see a large year-over-year increase for ministerial support. We see it in Energy, a 13 per cent year-over-year increase. We see it in Infrastructure, a 34.4 per cent year-over-year increase in ministerial support, and we see in Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour a year-over-year increase of 51 per cent. I have to wonder how the AUPE is going to respond to seeing that they're being asked to have 0, 0, 1, and 1 on their increases year over year, yet the minister responsible for this area sees a 51 per cent increase in his ministerial support budget. I guess he may have needed to get new walnut furniture and paint his furniture to be able to match, as he did in the last ministry he was in. This is exactly the kind of thing that demoralizes our public service, when they see politicians saying: do as I say, not as I do. Those are the scandals.

The other issue that we have is the absolute failure of the results-based budgeting process. We have the budget document and the throne speech trumpeting and proudly proclaiming that they've gone through 375 different programs and found all these efficiencies. Well, let me point out and give a shout out to the two ministries where they have managed to find efficiencies.

You look at the number of full-time equivalent employees that they now employ. Last year Education employed 649 full-time equivalents; this year it's going to be 648. They managed to find one full-time equivalent savings. Congratulations to the Education minister.

3:30

Let me also shout out – I should have done this one first because it's bigger. I should have done a shout-out to Service Alberta: last year 1,372 full-time equivalents, this year 1,370. They found two full-time equivalent positions in savings. This in living colour is what the savings are from the results-based budgeting process.

Now, let me tell you what I had anticipated seeing some of the savings being, because we were told that the new energy regulator was going to result in all of these efficiencies. I suppose by relation we had been told that we were going to as well see some efficiencies in how environmental regulations were implemented, a one-window approach making it easier. So I guess I anticipated that by bringing departments together, creating one window, you'd actually need fewer people to be able to push all that paperwork around. Silly me. It's not turned out to be that way. In ESRD we're actually seeing an increase of 206 full-time equivalent staff. They're now up to 2,640. And in the Alberta Energy Regulator they are up 101 full-time equivalent staff, to 2,076.

Mr. Speaker, when I see results like that, I have to tell you that I would call that non results-based budgeting because I would anticipate seeing something a little bit more in evidence that they're actually making some progress, and we're not seeing it.

I have to say that the other issue that has us quite concerned is that we see a budget come down on Thursday and then here we are on Tuesday already seeing other auxiliary announcements

being made, that weren't mentioned in the budget. The LRT is what I'm referring to. If it was so important – and it is important to make sure that we have appropriate funding for our municipalities; that's why we put our 10-10 plan for municipal funding forward – then why is it that two business days after the budget came out, there's a slapdash press conference put together to announce some other way in which to be able to fund a priority that should have actually been in the budget?

How can anyone have any confidence that what we're seeing in the budget today is actually what we're going to see next week or next month or two months from now? It's happened in the last couple of years that what comes forward in the budget gets completely thrown out the window with the mid-year announcements that end up getting made. It's just a bit surprising to me that this one occurred within two business days of the budget being released.

Let's talk a bit about capital because this is an important area. This is why we put forward our 10-year, \$50 billion, debt-free capital plan. An essential part of it is our 10-10 community infrastructure transfer, which would give long-term, sustainable, predictable funding to our municipalities that would increase with the increase in provincial tax revenues. We're already consulting with municipalities and hoping to hear back from them on what they think about the plan, but so far they're saying that that's exactly what they've been asking for from this government, and we wish the government would take note and do something similar.

The second part of it is – and I hear this everywhere I go – the need for a public prioritized project list. We know that the dollars flowing through to our municipalities are only one part of the overall picture of how much money needs to be invested in capital infrastructure. But I can tell you that there are so many projects where municipalities are left wondering whether or not they're going to have the resources they need to be able to fund them, not only because they're missing out on the long-term sustainable funding from the MSI funding but also because they're uncertain about what kind of capital grants are available to them.

In my own riding, in Okotoks, they have approved a pipeline project from Calgary to Okotoks to be able to fund their water needs. I think Okotoks is the only municipality in Alberta that does not have water allocation to be able to expand with their growth in residents. Okotoks is the only municipality where they're expected to go and buy their water licence off an oil company or an irrigation district or some other industrial development to be able to have enough water to ensure that their residents can continue using it. Their solution is to build a pipeline from Calgary to Okotoks, but there's uncertainty around the water for life program.

The water for life program would have been 90 per cent funded by the provincial government, 10 per cent funded by the municipality. We're hearing from some municipalities that they've received letters that they're no longer going to be funded to the 90 per cent amount, that it's going to be cut back. I have to say that for a community like Okotoks, it's unclear how they're going to be able to access those dollars to be able to build that project. If we had a 10-year public prioritized project list, then they would actually be able to know whether it was going to be three years from now, six years from now, or nine years from now. Right now they're kept in the dark.

I was just in Fort Saskatchewan last night. There's going to be \$20 billion worth of growth in the Industrial Heartland region. They have a particularly difficult interchange at highway 15. If you start going out at 3 o'clock in the afternoon to do your commute, you won't get home until 6:30. The North West upgrader is

going to bring 3,000 more employees into this area. And what's the government's proposal? They want to put in a couple of traffic circles or maybe some stoplights, but it isn't even in this three-year plan. This is a community that's been waiting for it for seven years. It's not in the three-year plan. When are they going to get it? Is it going to be six years from now, nine years from now? Nobody really knows. But if you actually had a 10-year prioritized project list and you had objective criteria for determining what interchanges would be a high priority and which ones could be moved further down the list, at least they would know. At least they would be able to have certainty.

My colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View has already pointed out that with the promise for 50 new schools and 70 modernizations the numbers don't add up in the budget. It looks like we're short at least \$800 million. The government admitted to that yesterday, that they don't quite know how they're going to fund all of these schools that they announced even though they're trying to pretend that they're going to have them all in place by the time we go into the next election. Well, we know that that's not true.

I've already mentioned that the LRT wasn't in the plan.

I met as well with the University of Alberta today, talking about some of the difficulties that they have with the capital funding. They called it lumpy, that it comes in one big lump, and the problem is that you don't know when it's your turn to get the lump and when it's the other universities' turns to get theirs. If we actually had a 10-year prioritized project list, we would actually be able to tell our universities like the University of Alberta and others about when their capital projects were going to come up.

Then, of course, there's flood mitigation. That was one thing that I was pleased to see in the government plan, that they've set some money aside for flood mitigation. I know that in High River they're looking at a dollar figure of somewhere around \$350 million to be able to get the projects that they need built to protect our community. I think there's about \$700 million unallocated. I'll be watching to see how that does get allocated, because I know that other communities are going to also have those needs.

But, again, it's not just the communities that were hit this time that need flood mitigation measures. There were 66 communities identified in George Groeneveld's 2005 flood report, and the question is: when are they going to be on the list? I'm delighted that my community and Calgary are high up on the priority list because of the tragic floods of last year, but let's not forget that this is not going to be just a one-time investment. We need to know what the long-term plan is, and unfortunately, because the government continues to refuse to have a long-term public prioritized list, we still don't have the answers to those questions.

More generally, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I believe that a culture change starts at the top. I have talked to countless front-line public-sector workers working their hearts out who are absolutely demoralized by the environment that they're working in: corrections officers on stress leave, nurses taking sick days, others who come to work counting up the days in which they can qualify to be able to take early pension. That's a horrible environment to work in. I think the government owes it to our front-line staff to start doing some of the right things so that they can get confidence back that they're valued on the front line.

I have to say that when you see the Premier pretending that she doesn't know that she shouldn't use the government plane for personal vacations, pretending that she doesn't know, and the cabinet as well pretending that they don't know that you shouldn't use the government plane to go to government fundraisers, having an expensive \$45,000 trip that should have been essentially for free and then refusing to pay it back: all of these kinds of things

demonstrate that we have a political leadership team that doesn't think they have to walk their talk. It filters down through the senior ranks of their own political offices, it filters down the senior ranks of the public administration, and it demoralizes our front-line public-sector unions.

I would point out – and I have before – that of our 22,000 public-sector union employees from AUPE only 88 of them were on the sunshine list. I would also point out that of our 22,000 AUPE front-line workers, 3,800 of them earn less than \$45,000 in a single year. When they see government making decisions to pay their senior political staff well in excess of the disclosure limit on the sunshine list, when they see the Premier taking a single five-day trip that cost in excess of what they earn in a year, you can just imagine the kind of environment that creates for those who are doing the work every single day to support the services that matter to Albertans.

3:40

I'm hoping, even though we don't see any evidence in this budget, that the Premier and the cabinet take these concerns seriously and start making the kind of small changes that will ultimately end up in paying big dividends not only for our front-line workers by creating a culture and an environment in which they're delighted and joyful to come to work on any given day but also one in which we could actually get to a full, real consolidated surplus that we can maintain so that we can start building surpluses and savings to not only take care of the needs of this generation but to also take care of the needs of future generations.

I have no intention to support this budget, Mr. Speaker. I think that it's an absolute missed opportunity for the government to have done the right thing. Unfortunately, it seems like when the right opportunity presents itself, the government always take another path.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available. Does anyone wish to take advantage of 29(2)(a)?

If not, we'll move on to the next main speaker. That's the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all Albertans and the Alberta Liberal caucus I'm pleased to respond to Budget 2014. Our economy is great. We have amongst the best employment rates in the country next to Saskatchewan, amongst the highest incomes. Our population is growing. We're up to 4 million people. The price of oil and natural gas is very, very good. We have amongst the hardest workers in the country if not the world. These are economic circumstances that anybody would like to be in a position to govern. This is as good as it gets. So my question is: why are we going into debt? We've had six successive deficit budget years, so last year what did the government do? They just changed the definition of balanced and changed how they budget.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta deserves not only a strong economy; we also deserve a strong society. You know, the Alberta Liberals called the budget before the election the fudge-it budget. The government got all excited and thought oil was going to keep going up and up. They overestimated revenues. The day after the election they brought in Budget 2013. We called that the bankrupt budget. That's when the government got all depressed and used an extremely low price on energy resource dollars as an excuse to break their promises and to attack the very programs and the very people that actually helped build a good economy, a strong

economy, and a strong society. This budget we call the over-under budget – so fudge-it budget, bankrupt budget, over-under budget – because regular, hard-working, everyday Albertans continue to be overtaxed and underserved.

I want to talk about being overtaxed. Mr. Speaker, we did some research. Alberta used to have a progressive income tax under Premier Lougheed. It was 44 per cent of the federal tax brackets. When Alberta went to a flat tax, taxes on lower income and middle-income Albertans actually went up, from 7.048 per cent to 10 per cent, and taxes on the wealthiest actually went down. Alberta Liberals recognize it's important for regular working families to have money in their pocket to spend on their house, on their bills, their car, to feed and clothe their children, to look after their parents, and to maybe have a little bit of fun on the side, eat out once in a while and go on a trip once in a while.

Now, there are other taxes on families. School fees. That's a tax, Mr. Speaker. School fees for working families. If you have kids in school, you're paying up to \$530 a year on school fees. The busing fees are taxes. Having amongst the highest tuition fees in the country and noninstructional fees: this is a form of a tax. The provincial government, the Conservative government, has downgraded responsibilities to the municipalities, especially urban municipalities who've had to raise their property taxes. That's also a tax which is hurting families and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, not only are Albertans being overtaxed; they're also being underserved. Let's have a look. Right now Alberta has, as the output of this government, one of the highest high school dropout rates in the country, class sizes that are beyond imaginable. We don't have the teachers and we don't have the support for the teachers that we need to build a better Alberta, to build a better future for our society. The government did one of the biggest cutbacks in history, at least in modern-day history, in postsecondary education last year. They still have not reversed those cutbacks.

Our seniors continue to be nickel-and-dimed. In fact, the government has gone so far as to cut seniors' programs in here, that our seniors rely on. Mr. Speaker, why is it that in the wealthiest place in the country we have the lowest postsecondary participation rate? It's hurting individuals, individual families, communities, and it's actually hurting industry. It's hurting our economy because the education system, that this government severely underfunds from early childhood to kindergarten and from kindergarten to grade 12 to postsecondary, is underfunded, and it's not performing as it possibly could.

We just met with school board trustees, public and Catholic, in Edmonton. There is a lot of deferred maintenance, Mr. Speaker, built up over the years. Our schools in the Edmonton Catholic school system alone: a quarter of a billion dollars' worth of deferred maintenance. If you don't maintain your schools, they're going to get broken down and moldy. You've got to fix the roof.

Our schools already don't have the teachers that they need. We have 40,000 more kids in the school system today than a few years ago, yet we didn't get the teachers and the support they need.

Mr. Speaker, not only are Albertans not getting the services they need; the province is actually going into debt. My question is: where is our money going? Where is our money going? The Alberta Liberal budget would focus around three principles: one, fiscal prudence; two, social responsibility; and three, environmental responsibility. These are things that we are not seeing in this budget, and they are missing. These are essential elements for our economy moving forward.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think that with the current Conservative government, basically, their budget is to spend today and pay tomorrow. What they call spending we call investing in education.

We believe there's a simpler way to do this, and this is how you do it.

One, on the stronger economy side, first the government has to stop wasteful spending. There are many examples of wasteful spending. In fact, I'm going to give credit to the Wildrose here. They've done a good job of identifying at least half a billion dollars' worth of government waste. In fact, I believe all of us legislators here can agree on that. That has to be cut. [some applause] Mr. Speaker, you've got to give credit where credit is due. You do.

I don't think anybody could disagree with the fact that the Premier and cabinet should not be flying around on \$45,000 flights and hiring more scribblers and more people for entertainment in the Premier's office. Hosting expenses: gosh, \$400,000 more for champagne and caviar and foie gras in the Premier's office alone.

What this budget doesn't address is prudent fiscal management. The Premier talks about results-based budgeting. Let's talk about results-based budgeting. Health care spending: we spend amongst the most in the country on health care, yet the results that they're posting on the website – they took the results down. They took the numbers down. In fact, you were the Minister of Health who put them all up, Mr. Speaker, because you knew we needed to show the results to the public. In fact, we did that together, and I thank you very much for that. The government took those results down and watered down the benchmarks and moved the goalposts. Eighteen billion dollars' worth of spending each and every year: if you can't manage health care, you can't govern. It is the number one spending issue for every provincial government in this country.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, health care spending is up from \$11.9 billion in 2007 to now more than \$18 billion. Jeez, that's more than a 45 per cent increase. The population has gone up maybe 17 per cent. Health spending to Alberta Health Services alone is up 62 per cent from 2007 while the population is up maybe 15, 17 per cent. Why are we not getting the performance and access to care? The key here is access.

The reason I talk about health care is because as a physician, as somebody who was the associate minister of health care, the parliamentary assistant, as somebody who believes in fiscal responsibility, we deserve to get better health care and better access to health care for the amount of money we're spending. In fact, I believe that we can probably get better access to better health care for a billion dollars less.

I'd like to see the results-based budgeting of the health care system, \$18 billion. Let's open up the books. We have seen many examples of waste and mismanagement in health care: managers managing managers managing managers. Heck, the government keeps firing its own managers every, you know, four weeks to four months.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about cutting wasteful spending, maybe half a billion dollars. Better management of health care: that's about \$1.5 billion.

Now, there are ways to increase our revenues as well. Here's how you increase the revenues: if we actually brought in world best practices on the environment and put a real price on carbon. [interjections] Hon. members from the Conservative caucus, please pay attention. If we actually removed the criticisms of our energy industry, the environmental barriers that this government has put in place, where our credibility has been put at stake, brought in world best practices on the environment, and put a real price on carbon – a real price on carbon would be a consumption

tax paid by the tailpipes where our product goes: eastern Canadians, our American partners, the Europeans, the Chinese, or India, wherever our product goes. A real price on carbon would bring \$1.8 billion a year into Alberta. If we actually dealt with environmental issues, we could get our pipelines to tidewater, and we would get the world/international price for our product. That's one way to increase our revenue.

Another way to increase our revenue: if we went to a progressive income tax, which would be a tax cut for the majority of Albertans. Yeah, the billionaires and the multimillionaires will pay their share, and, yeah, some of these MLAs are going to pay a little bit more. Mr. Speaker, you don't get rich without a good public education system and public health system and public roads and public infrastructure and hundreds or thousands of hard-working people earning 50, 60 grand a year who have children that need to be educated. People like Warren Buffett understand that. If we actually brought in a progressive income tax, we could bring in, you know, \$750 million to 1 and a half billion dollars a year. So \$1.8 billion on our carbon tax, \$750 million to \$1.5 billion on a progressive income tax. You know, I don't think we need to touch taxes too much, but just tax in fairness.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the royalty holidays are expiring. We're going to go from 1 per cent to 25 per cent royalties on all these plants. There's a lot of revenue. We have a lot of money; it's just been mismanaged, wasted and mismanaged. The Alberta Liberal plan would invest in nonprofit, community-based home care and long-term care and a seniors' drug program. We'd get people out of hospital so that the most expensive thing on the books, the health system, can actually function. Getting the seniors out will save a quarter of a billion dollars alone and reduce the lines, which will save more money.

Investing. We would take that billion dollars and invest a third of it in our seniors and our community support system for the disabled and seniors so that they don't have to come to the hospital. If they're in, we get them out. We invest a third of that into getting Albertans family doctors and invest in primary care networks and integrate those into the health system. Fragmenting primary care into family care clinics and PCNs, with everyone doing different things, is actually going to hurt patients. You need one mechanic to look after your body, and that mechanic needs a team. That mechanic is your family doctor, supported by nurse practitioners, the whole health team. We would take a third of that money and get caught up on all the lineups, the wait-lists for hip, knee, and cardiac surgeries.

Alberta Liberals would make the largest investment in history, investment into education from early childhood to K to 12 to postsecondary. We would bring in schools as community hubs. If our schools are built as community hubs, we know it will save money in other areas: health care, children and youth services, and other support systems. If we co-locate the facilities in our school system, it will save money, and we will have a better society, prepared for a better economy.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I could go on and on and on. With the Liberal plan we can actually balance the budget and get Albertans the services that they need and save for the future. This is a plan that Premier Lougheed had. It was about investing in our children, investing in the future. This is the kind of Alberta we would like to build. In fact, I believe we can build even a better Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available. Calgary-Mountain View under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments of the leader and would ask him to expand on what the Liberal vision is for prevention and community health promotion.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Mr. Speaker, prevention is the key. They say that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In our instance, you know, a couple of hundred million dollars' worth of prevention would probably save a billion dollars on the other side of the budget.

Now, let's talk about prevention. Prevention is not just in health care. If we actually invest, say, in the health care system, the preventative side of the health system, all international evidence points to the fact that we will save money on the other side of the system, that's costing us a lot of money. We would save money immediately, and in the medium and long term we would save a lot of money, and more importantly we would improve the lives of people.

Let's talk about the children and youth services system. The government spends a lot of money on the problem side of the system, but if they actually invested upstream, into preventing the problem, we would improve the lives of children and families and have fewer children in care. For those that are in care, they would get the best, world-class care.

Mr. Speaker, poverty leads to poor health, and poor health leads to poverty. We have 90,000 children living in poverty today, right now, in Alberta. Poor kids come from poor families. This is why Alberta Liberals want to cut the taxes of middle-income and lower middle-income working families. We want to get free high-quality, world-class child care for all Albertans. You know, many of them are low-income single mothers, and many of them are new immigrants.

We must invest in child care. We've got to make sure we invest in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, full-day kindergarten, especially in the high-risk areas. If we invest in infant nutrition, prenatal and postnatal programs, and get young mothers parenting coaches and ensure that that mother has a chance to finish her education and get a skill, get a trade, and the child gets looked after, Mr. Speaker, imagine how wonderful this place would be. It's pretty good already, but imagine how great it could be.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Let's talk about prevention in the criminal justice system. If we actually invested in mental health and addictions, we would reduce costs in the criminal justice system. If we invested in policy that reduced poverty, we would reduce homelessness and mental health and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, here is the problem: 42 years. You know, I believe the first 16 years were probably pretty good. The first 14, 16 years were actually really good under Premier Lougheed. But in the last few years this has been a very reactionary government that has put very expensive Band-Aids on the problems. Now they're falling off, and that's why many in our society are not participating in the prosperity of this great province.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberals want to make sure that this province will be great once again: our credibility on the environment across the country; the morale of the health staff, of the doctors and the nurses and the support staff and the cleaning staff; our patients get the care that they deserve; our children get the education that they deserve. We have the best and brightest moving here because they want to get a world-class university education. In fact, we retain the best and brightest. They stay here.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to build a strong economy and a strong society that's premised on fiscal prudence, social responsibility, and environmental responsibility. We should be balancing the social books and the fiscal books and putting money in the bank.

Thank you, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak to Budget 2014. I'm going to make sure that I start the stopwatch here so I know where I am. Obviously, one of the first things that sticks out about Budget 2014 is the record revenue that we are making as a province. This, of course, is good news, absolutely good news. It certainly has very little to do with this government. It has to do with the entrepreneurs of Alberta. It has to do with some great blessings that we've had and luck that we've had as a province to have such a wonderful amount of natural resources, and that's always a good thing.

We do have a record revenue stream right now. That is why people are really baffled by this budget. The budget obviously was called the building Alberta budget by the folks opposite, but it should be called the doubling down on debt budget. It is an irresponsible document, it is a dangerous document, and it is a document that, I believe, Albertans are going to have to look at in the next election and decide what path they want to go down because we're at a crossroads here as a province. We should have had this discussion in general election 2012. Sadly, because of, frankly, some dishonesty by the other side, we did not have that discussion, which was unfortunate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if I may, I'd just caution you on your choice of words.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. I understand that, Mr. Speaker. I was not accusing any member of the House. I just said dishonesty by the campaign opposite, and it's within my rights to do so.

With regard to making sense of the Alberta budget and breaking it down, yes, there is an operational surplus of \$2.6 billion. Not much worth celebrating there. Premiers Klein and Stelmach had operating surpluses every year except for 2010-11 where they had a very small \$50 million operational deficit. The current Premier in her first two budgets has had large operational deficits despite having the three best revenue years taken together in the entire history of the province.

The second piece is that the government is claiming a consolidated surplus of \$1.1 billion. How that works is – we have a chart on our online website that I hope everyone will go to. We posted on Twitter, Facebook, et cetera. It's a document that breaks down the budget so people can take a look at how the PCs get their \$1.1 billion surplus. Essentially what they do is include, obviously, their operational spending, they include all the revenues, and they include what are called capital grants: MSI, grants for roads, grants to communities for different roads and different projects where the money is given to community. Grants, essentially. Those grants in 2013 totalled about \$2.4 billion, so the government claims that's a \$1.1 billion surplus.

What it does not include is \$4.2 billion in what's called capital investment. Those are provincial roads, provincial bridges, health facilities, schools, postsecondary institutions, and so forth. That \$4.2 billion is not included in the consolidated budget number, and that's where their budget document is clearly misleading. If you include capital investment, not just capital grants like MSI but you include capital investment – the roads, the bridges, the

schools, the health facilities, et cetera – then the deficit is at least \$2.7 billion this year.

That is the true deficit number. Is that an improvement from last year's budget? It is. Thanks to the increased revenues, we do have a smaller consolidated deficit of \$2.7 billion. But it is absolutely untrue, misleading, and wrong to suggest that it is a \$1.1 billion surplus.

Mr. Speaker, the real crux of this budget, though, was a decision by the government to double down on the debt, and that's what I want to focus most of my time on today. I could point the minister to the Auditor General, to former Minister Ted Morton, and other recent former Finance ministers that have spoken out about this. We could talk about, you know, dozens and dozens of commentators from across the country that have said that this is folly.

We can even cite *The Economist* magazine, Mr. Speaker, but I'm not going to because I don't think this minister cares too much about that. He's going to find a few bankers and a CA buddy representing the Alberta chamber to back up his assertions, and he's going to . . .

An Hon. Member: Jim Flaherty.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, Jim Flaherty. That's right.

He's going to say, "Well, because of that, we're doing the right thing," and I disagree. We're not doing the right thing, and I don't think that history is going to reflect kindly on this Finance minister or this government for these decisions.

There is one study I do want to point out, though, and it is interesting. It's from the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, and it was a 2012 study which, after cracking the different numbers and projections and forecasts, showed that Alberta faced the greatest risk among Canada's provinces of defaulting on its debt in 30 years and that Canada as a whole faced a eurozone-like debt crisis because of the high spending by provinces. The author, Mr. Marc Joffe, pointed to Ontario and Alberta as facing the greatest potential pitfalls for a default on our finances over the next 30 years.

Now, Mr. Joffe is a very well-respected economist. He is the principal consultant at Public Sector Credit Solutions in San Francisco; senior director at Moody's Analytics, where he worked for nine years; researched, co-authored Kroll Bond Rating Agency's 2011 U.S. municipal bond default study. He recently published the public sector credit framework for estimating government bond default probabilities. He has a BA and MBA from NYU and is completing his MPA at San Francisco State University. But I'm sure the minister's CA buddy knows more than Mr. Joffe does about these things.

These findings were also endorsed by Mr. Don Drummond, a senior economist, as people know, adviser to TD Bank, a Matthews fellow on global policy, and distinguished visiting scholar at the School of Policy Studies at Queens University.

These are senior people, senior economists, experts in the field that say that Alberta is in severe danger of defaulting on our debt obligations moving forward into the future, not in the short term but in the long term.

Incidentally, who else sits on the board of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, which commissioned this report? Well, it's none other than the hon. former Finance minister, Jim Dinning. Boy, we sure have come a long way from the days of Jim Dinning and not in a good way.

Budget 2014 adds over \$5 billion in debt this year and brings Alberta's total debt to over \$21 billion by 2016. The Finance minister, of course, has compared debt financing for infrastructure

to a home mortgage. This is an absolutely ridiculous comparison. A home mortgage is secured by an appreciating asset: the home. Because of the down payment made on the home, that home is almost always worth more than the amount of the loan. Almost always. I mean, there are exceptions. But in Alberta, in particular, there are really no exceptions. It's almost always worth more than the amount of the loan. And it's easy to sell. It's easy to sell on the market, get a real estate agent, sell it yourself. You can sell your home and get back that money, pay off your owing amount.

In contrast, government assets depreciate in value, are very expensive to keep up, they are worth less than they cost to build the moment they open or start. The very moment, immediately they're worth less than what it cost to build, and they are difficult to sell even if you would want to sell a school or a hospital or a road. Even if you wanted to, for some reason, sell those public infrastructure assets, it's difficult to do so. You certainly wouldn't do it very much. You would do it in very few instances.

4:10

The minister also says that because interest rates are currently low, now is the time to borrow. Interest rates are low, Mr. Speaker, for now. But these debts that are on the books will need to be refinanced. We're refinancing almost a billion dollars in debt just this year alone. But these debts, because they need to be refinanced – as our debt load increases, so will the available interest rate. As our debt goes up, as the senior economists with this Macdonald-Laurier Institute have said, what will happen is that the price of borrowing will go up for Alberta. It will keep going up and up and up and up. As that happens, of course, we will have new and increased annual interest charges that we'll have to deal with. So the \$800 million today is going to increase to \$1.2 billion, by the government's own numbers, in interest charges by 2016, and then it just keeps going up from there if the borrowing continues.

It's amazing to me that we seem to have forgotten the consequences of sustained debt financing in Europe, in the United States, in Ontario. How could we not see those lessons? How could we go down that path? Have we lost our minds to think that we, somehow, need to follow in the footsteps of Ontario, of Quebec, of the United States, of Europe? That was a good idea? We should be doing what they're doing? Unbelievable.

When these realities manifest themselves, when Alberta doesn't enjoy record revenues anymore, when we can't count on billions upon billions of new revenues every single year because of the oil sands and the price of oil and so forth, guess who's going to be holding the bag? Them? No, Mr. Speaker. They won't. They'll be long gone, hopefully most of them in two years. But if they're not, guess what? It's going to be our kids and our grandkids that are going to be the ones holding the bag for their stupidity, and that is wrong, that absolute irresponsibility of putting our children into debt like this. It's wrong, and I challenge everyone over there that still believes in leaving our kids with a debt-free Alberta to stand up and vote against this budget. I know there are people over there – certainly not the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but there are certainly a lot of people, I would assume, over there that don't think going \$21 billion into debt by 2016 is a responsible thing to do. Please stand up and be accounted for.

The minister states that folks moving to Alberta aren't bringing their roads and schools with them and that we must borrow, therefore, in order to build. Think about this logic. Let's play this through. First off, new Albertans, of course, don't bring their roads with them, but they bring their taxes. They bring their economic output. They are not a drain on the bottom line. They are good for the bottom line. What study out there shows that new

Albertans, new people moving in – and we're not talking about people that are coming who are leeching off the system. These are some of the best and brightest minds in the country and the world coming here, working high-paying jobs, paying high amounts of taxes. We're not being hurt by this. We're being blessed by this. Our revenues are increasing. That's why we have record revenues, one of the reasons we have record revenues. So that is a faulty excuse.

Secondly, if we must borrow for projects now to cope with high growth, what's going to change in the future so we no longer have to borrow? Forecasts predict high population growth for decades. Those folks will all need schools and they will all need roads and they will all need hospitals. So if we can't build today without going into debt, even with record revenues, when are we ever going to be able to? When the rate of economic growth slows? When people stop moving here? Well, that doesn't make much sense. When people stop moving here, that usually means it's because you're having an economic contraction and you're having a revenue problem. And then what do we do to pay the bills, to pay the high interest costs that we've incurred during the high-growth times? It makes no sense.

And they say: "Oh, well, we'll cap it at about \$30 billion. That's what the legislation allows for. We have a debt ceiling, so we won't go past that." Baloney. We all know debt ceilings don't work. They don't work in the United States. They're not going to work here. They didn't work in any other province. Of course, we're going to go more into debt. As soon as we get to the level, we'll just raise the debt ceiling. We're going to be mortgaging our kids more and more every year during high-growth, during high-revenue times. Then when the economic growth slows, our kids are holding the bag.

Mr. Speaker, I don't claim to be any kind of an expert economist or anything like that, but I am a father, and I'm a father of four. I have a great father, and he taught me some basic things in life. He said: son, you have to live within your means. He taught me about the power of compound interest and the power of staying out of debt and how important it is to do all of those things. These are basic, basic principles.

Importantly, he also taught me to leave my children with more opportunities than I had. I think we all try to do that, but as a province we are not doing that right now. We have lost our way. We are going to leave our kids – we had the chance to leave them a mountain of investment capital that could be invested for literally decades and decades to replace our reliance on oil and gas revenues. Not only are we not leaving them with any of that; we're leaving them with a hole. We're leaving them in the hole, in debt to pay for the things that this government wants to give for political purposes. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Hale: On 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: I think you were a little slow there, hon. member.

I'll recognize the next speaker. Is there another speaker?

Seeing none, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd move to adjourn debate on the budget replies.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 4
Estate Administration Act

[Adjourned debate March 10: Ms Kubinec]

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise to speak to Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act. Bill 4 essentially modernizes some of our estate law as well as codifies some of the principles that exist in our common law and the decisions that were made by courts. Bill 4 intends to define the roles and responsibilities of personal representatives when they execute the final affairs of a deceased person. According to the preamble and some of the briefings the purpose of Bill 4 is to make the rules of an executor clear and easily accessible for those charged with this important task.

What's also included in the bill, of course, is an elevated responsibility for executors who have certain skills and abilities. If a layperson is executing the act, they have the normal due diligence requirements, but if, for example, you're an accountant or a lawyer, you would be charged with that higher level of care or, essentially, a higher fiduciary duty.

Mr. Speaker, along with those good faith and due diligence requirements the duties, under Bill 4, of the personal representatives would be

- (a) to identify the estate assets and liabilities,
- (b) to administer and manage the estate,
- (c) to satisfy the debts and obligations of the estate, and
- (d) to distribute and account for the administration of the estate.

There is also some delineation of the specific notice requirements that executors must go through when they're going through the list of the beneficiaries.

I have had the opportunity to do some stakeholder outreach with some of the best estate lawyers in the province, and the individuals that I've talked to haven't indicated any types of red flags. They were quite pleased with the vast majority of the changes to the act.

There is one issue that they mentioned, though. The legislation deals with foreign grants from the United Kingdom, but there doesn't appear to be a provision with respect to grants from the United States. So it would be interesting to see whether or not the government has contemplated that or whether or not that could be one of the issues to debate in the Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Speaker, at this stage of second reading I fully support the intent of the legislation and will look forward to debating the details in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, did you move to adjourn debate?

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:20 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 1
Savings Management Act

The Chair: Are there comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. This is actually the first opportunity I've had to make some comments in regard to Bill 1, and the particular area of interest that I would like to speak about today is something that I didn't really believe this government was inserting into the fabric of Bill 1. But upon hearing some questions about it last week, lo and behold, it seems to be true. The issue that I'm speaking of is social impact bonds. This is an issue that I've been looking at more closely as they have been unrolled in other jurisdictions around the world, including the United Kingdom. I guess I just have some serious concerns and questions about them that I wanted to raise here now and perhaps, you know, in the Committee of the Whole. This is a great chance to actually get that clarification and put people's minds at ease or, conversely, take this experiment out.

My concerns are these, right? The social impact bonds have been used in other jurisdictions around the world, Mr. Chair, as a way to privatize vital, essential services and squeeze out the public sector, another way, in other words, to abdicate the responsibility of a government to provide essential public services. Rather, they commodify and monetize those services and sell them as a bond. While that almost might seem bizarre to the casual observer, indeed, as I said before, there seemed to be some noise about that from the government here when we asked some questions about Bill 1 last week.

You know, Mr. Chair, the government cuts education and social services in this province and then, still spending money from the heritage fund, allows the private sector somehow to do the government's job. I mean, it almost sounds diabolical, really. How could you come up with such a combination of taking savings and then have the audacity to create a bond issue that would somehow have another party do the job that the government is responsible for, right? That's why I'm bringing it up here. Hopefully, maybe I'm not right about this. I don't know. This bill does not introduce these bonds themselves, but it does transfer the money and establish the accounts that could be used to guarantee or pay these things out if the government chose to do so.

It also brings in the Alberta future fund, I understand, Mr. Chair, which will take \$200 million a year from the heritage fund and put it aside for, quote, something cool, according to the Deputy Premier, that's meant to provide long-term benefits to Albertans and the economy. Again, really, if I wasn't reading it in the paper and I didn't hear it myself, I would say: what on earth is this? Lots of people have been speculating that maybe it's another way to create a slush fund or a pre-election goodie sort of thing where, because the principal doesn't have to be voted on, they can just make the vote or pass that money through. I don't know. You know, I'm trying not to be cynical here, just constructively critical. According to Bill 1, again, there are additional funds for heritage scholarships, agriculture, and food innovation as well.

Mr. Chair, I believe this is an indication both that this government is not providing the budget properly nor maintaining adequately the services for which they are responsible as well. It also is, I think, quite a murky sort of budgeting. We have seen in the past years these different funds, right? Indeed, it helps to sort of confuse or obfuscate the accounting methods by which these different funds and budgets actually come together to create a balance sheet. We see the money moving around here and there

between different funds, and somehow in the midst of all of this the essential public services are underfunded.

In regard to these social impact bonds, again, they're very similar to P3s, private-public partnerships, which are on very shaky ground at best. To try to do them in terms of providing social services I find even less believable, quite frankly. It's a profit-driven, government-funded business deal, right? It's less about service delivery or meeting the needs of Albertans. It's more a way by which to repackage essential social services into an investment scheme as if they're investing in a mineral or an oil well or a forestry project or something like that.

Say, for example, you know, we take the word on debt to wealthy investors without it showing up in the balance sheets as debt – right? – to somehow innovate social services, which suggests as well, Mr. Chair, that we need the private sector to tell us what innovation means for social services, when in reality it is social services that have been innovating, really, year after year, delivering more with less as the PCs cut their bottom line.

The truth of social impact bonds is that they pick the low-hanging fruit, they offer no real innovation, and they'll only invest in projects where the risks are largely removed. The whole thing doesn't add up to a very good investment for the public and for ourselves but maybe, if it's packaged properly, for people who choose to put money into these things.

Mr. Chair, last year, for example, the state Legislature of Hawaii ruled out social impact bonds for the delivery of education programs. Their report noted that the social impact bonds are very unproven and very risky and that existing philanthropic organizations are already doing a good job of innovation, as is the public service that's actually there as a government department.

It's not just not delivering innovation. There are many other issues, too, right? I believe, Mr. Chair, it opens the nonprofit program delivery of organizations to a great deal of administrative and transactional costs. Already we've seen this PC government make it difficult for nonprofits by providing short-term grants on this three-month rotation or four-month rotation. It drives up the time and the costs to agencies in applying for grants and reduces their ability to pay for and plan for long-term, stable service.

Now it's as though we're introducing several other layers of bureaucracy and middle management to already overburdened social service and delivery organizations. It's now these organizations that have to go back out and act like salespeople and investment bankers in order to attract investors. They must hire legal counsel and financial advisers. It's just that the whole thing seems to be redundant and reductive as well.

We can go to other places where these are being tried, right? In the United Kingdom they have the Peterborough prison project, which found that the process was time consuming, analytically complex, and a nonstarter, really. There were problems with regulation, accreditation of service providers. Agencies already have difficulties with this. What kind of oversight, really, could we be providing for them here?

Social service delivery should be better regulated, for sure, Mr. Chair, not less. The government is attempting to transfer responsibility away from itself to these nonprofits.

4:30

Social impact bonds put the agencies in the indefensible position of having to serve the interests of the investors over those of their clients that they're trying to help or over those long-term goals of finding true, systemic solutions to social problems, right? The more difficult and, hence, costlier and riskier programs could very well go unfunded or be underfunded, and this means that

many of the most vulnerable Albertans who require a great deal more service and care will in fact be at greater risk.

This PC government is already having difficulties finding companies willing to bid on P3s. What would make them think that they would be able to encourage investment in even riskier and more complex processes with this idea of social impact bonds? In the state of Massachusetts, in the United States, two projects were announced in 2002, and nobody bid on them, these social impact bonds. Imagine that. They'll always end up costing the government more in the long run, right? It just seems like a nonstarter.

Governments are better placed to deliver programs, Mr. Chair, in cost-efficient ways because they have economies of scale and the ability to fund interconnected programs to address systemic issues. Aside from being ineffective and more costly, social impact bonds just really smell morally wrong. The government's failure to solve defined social problems turns into an investment opportunity that promises profit rewards to successfully innovative investors. I mean, I don't know. It just doesn't seem right.

The Alberta College of Social Workers passed a resolution explicitly opposing this type of legislation. They say that they allow financial institutions to turn human suffering and conditions into a commodity. Again, they also put a statement out saying that we don't need people to profit from the misery of others, that the motive becomes profit, not service, and that the primary responsibility of government is to support vulnerable and marginalized people.

So, Mr. Chair, while we might look at other aspects of this Bill 1 in terms of the savings and management, this one particular aspect of it, as I pretty clearly just said, I find unacceptable, and I just would like to hear someone say, you know, really, that Bill 1 is not a framework for social impact bonds so that we're not heading down this very perilous and experimental sort of road.

You don't just have to make change for the sake of change. Using the word "innovation" and then fishing around for something to appear to be radically changing direction is not necessarily good governance. If you end up fishing and you catch something like the social impact bond concept, then, you know, it just heads down a path that I don't think anybody really wants to go. It seems ideologically driven. It's reductive. It doesn't provide any sort of outcomes outside of some ideological idea that you can commodify and buy and sell everything, and it abdicates the responsibility that the provincial government has to essential social services, to fund and to deliver those services in a reasonable sort of way.

I mean, you know, convince me that it's otherwise, but the aspect of Bill 1 in regard to social impact bonds I don't think is acceptable at all. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? Other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my first opportunity to speak to Bill 1, too. I'm intrigued by it, and I'm very pleased to add my concerns, questions, and interest. I have heard a little bit about this, the concept of social impact bonds, for several years now. I've spoken with groups like the Calgary Foundation. There are groups in Calgary like the YWCA and Vecova, formerly the vocational and rehabilitation institute, where they have some entrepreneurial activity within their walls. In the case of the YWCA they have a sports facility that charges downtown folks, the office towers, for their facility, and they use that money to improve the care of women in difficulty and their families. In the case of Vecova they have also some sports activities for the public, and they bring in income, which they can

also use to assist with some of their programs for people with disabilities.

Other examples are Women in Need Society in Calgary, that sells quite a few commodities and, for example, indicated that a new baler that they purchased could bring together a lot of the clothing and bale it if they weren't able to sell it. They could then, again with dollars, translate that to people in other provinces or other areas of the province, which saved them a lot of cost in terms of also serving the needs outside the city.

I don't have a closed mind to the social impact bonds. I think there are some opportunities if it's well managed. I also know a couple of people in Calgary who are involved in social entrepreneurship, and they have given me a deeper insight than I had initially about this also.

It does have real dangers, as previous speakers have indicated. I think all of us should be wary of a government that wants to download responsibility onto the private sector for what is primarily government responsibility; that is, caring for people in poverty, caring for people in disadvantaged situations, caring for seniors and for people with disabilities.

The other red flag that goes up for me is when they are prepared to take money from the heritage fund, which has always been seen as a long-term investment program to improve the opportunities for future generations when needed. The typical imagined scenario would be when oil runs out or people stop buying our oil as readily as they do and there are other technologies and we need to find through research and development and through marketing new opportunities for Albertans to be employed, to create new jobs, and diversify some of our energy mix, in particular. That's the typical scenario that I think Peter Lougheed envisioned for this fund. So I'm concerned that the government would be taking up to \$200 million out of the heritage fund ostensibly for good cause, and ostensibly it would come back, at least the capital, if not the interest, for the social innovation fund that they identify here.

The other two areas of investment that they talk about are the agriculture and food initiative, which would be a maximum of \$9 million each fiscal year – by the way, the social innovation fund would be a maximum of \$67,500,000 – and transfers to the Alberta future fund, which sounds very suspiciously like the sustainability fund, which could be a slush fund for a government that's in trouble, having another crisis and looking for ways to buy its way out of crisis or in an election in which they are struggling to appeal to Albertans. So there are dangers here.

I'm pleased to see that we're going to continue to some extent the scholarship fund and look forward to hearing more about some of the potential here for research and development, which has been so brutally mismanaged in the innovation fund and the decimation of the Alberta heritage for medical research fund. The insecurity and instability that that's created has sent a lot of our best researchers to other parts of the world and very much diminished our capacity to do good science, credible science, and groundbreaking science, that we've done here for at least 25 years under the original heritage fund process.

4:40

I still haven't decided how I'll vote on this bill, Mr. Chair. It's got some elements that are already in place when you look at some of the nonprofit societies in Calgary that I mentioned, but it also has a private enterprise dimension that I think raises flags. As a legislator I guess I would want to know very much more detail about how individual contracts are being identified in terms of social programs. I'm speaking now of the social innovation fund more than some of the others. It's reminiscent to me of the P3 concept, where in principle it may have some applications where it

benefits both the public and the private sector, but in practice it is almost universally benefiting the private sector. Because we don't do due diligence and we don't make the contracts public, we don't have the accountability and transparency that are needed with some of these P3 contracts.

I'm concerned, as others have been on this side of the House, that especially the social innovation fund is fraught with nepotism and cronyism and the potential for benefit to friends and connections and is not necessarily going to serve either the long-term interests of the individuals that are supposed to benefit from this but also not necessarily the interests of Albertans, who have in trust put these funds within the heritage savings trust fund and expect accountability, expect that we're going to see real return on these investments and not simply another way for a government that is in trouble financially to try another way of limiting their apparent liability on the books.

With those caveats I can see some opportunity for innovation, for strengthening the kind of activities that I've seen in the YWCA in Calgary, the Vecova institute, and Women in Need Society, who have benefited from some of these entrepreneurial projects that go on within their walls. It helps sustain some of their work. I am much more suspicious of the for-profit opportunities that might arise out of these social impact bonds, not only the ability to get return on investment from the public purse but also to ensure that this money that is leaving the heritage fund is not going to be lost as an investment resource for future generations.

With those remarks, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks. I just wanted to thank you, Member for Calgary-Mountain View, for those comments. I wanted to just perhaps clarify the social impact bond, differentiating it from entrepreneurial innovation that nonprofit or other groups might use to provide social services or help to fund social services. I mean, very specifically, the social impact bond as it's been, you know, done in the last few places around the world – like I said, in New York City and the United Kingdom and so forth – is an investment where a private investor will fund a program or a project delivered by a nonprofit or a charitable agency. If that project meets the previous agreed upon measurable goals, then the government will pay the investors the full amount of their initial investment plus a 20 or 10 per cent return on their investment. If they don't meet that target, then they lose their money.

It's a very specific sort of scheme that's set up. It's almost like this *Dragons' Den* kind of scenario. It's very artificial because you're creating these parameters you could decide on yourself – right? – in terms of outcomes. Really, it's just like you're lending the money, so it's not even really a bond. To use the word "bond" – I think it's not entirely a true definition of a bond, right? It's this sort of convoluted contract that is developed.

For the YWCA or YMCA to be setting up these social or entrepreneurial things is great, but this sort of, you know, funny contractual scheme is a whole different thing altogether. You know, people are starting to line up already to put money aside to lobby, to buy these bonds. The Royal Bank of Canada has already put aside \$20 million to potentially invest in these once we set up the framework for it. People like Mark Hlady – he's been lobbying the government here for months to be a broker for social impact bonds in education, justice, human services, agriculture as well.

It's much more of a scheme than it is a way for people to get a leg up or an arm up or to learn about entrepreneurial opportunities. It's more like this sort of convoluted contract that somehow allows a private investor to get their hands on public money.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, then I would ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: Are there questions or comments to be offered on the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 3?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

The Chair: Are there questions or comments to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. In regard to the supplementary supply act I just had a couple of comments to talk about.

First and foremost, there was a clear indication to our caucus that this supplementary supply was going to be mostly if not all flood related, but there are all kinds of things that pop out from it. As far as I can see, there are sort of two major themes that come out of this supplementary supply. First of all, clearly, this government does not think about the long-term impact of its cuts, right? They ignore inconvenient things like planning and prevention to give breaks, and then suddenly, you know, we have to go back and change it.

I think we've seen in the last couple of days here again this government not – the most important document and action that it is responsible for suddenly becomes a fluid and moving target, and that is the budget. They made some of these rash decisions, and then suddenly we have to scramble back and change over time. I mean, there's nothing wrong with trying to change, but why make such drastic decisions in the first place? So it's necessary to do this, but I'm just putting it forward, once again, that it shouldn't really be necessary if we had responsible decisions in the first place.

4:50

For example, say, the \$170 million for Education, \$70 million of which is operational, \$103 million for the capital due to the

project delays of 35 schools and modernizations. This government seems clearly more focused on announcements than actually resolving the problems in our overcrowded schools, right? We can't even finish the projects that we announced three years ago, from a different government, on time. If there was a long-term commitment to building these schools and not just this episodic, sort of spasmodic, you know, reaction to the obvious growth that's taking place in our population, particularly for school-age children, then we could probably do this. I mean, it's not easy, but it's a better position than the shrinking economy. We have a growing economy, a growing population. We wouldn't have to be putting kids in copy rooms and in hallways like we do in schools around the province. We're growing, and this would be preventable if we actually had a budget that was commensurate with the actual population and economic growth. Those are my concerns, really.

Another one is for Energy, \$192 million: \$157 million of that to transport our royalties in kind to market, right? We still have this faulty royalty regime, Mr. Chair, that undervalues our resources and sells Alberta very short. If we were meeting the 35 per cent target set by an earlier PC government rather than this very, very inadequate 10 per cent, then we would have plenty of resources by which to not just balance the budget but save for the future. This idea of using 20 per cent of our nonrenewable resources to pay for operational activities is clearly living on borrowed time. If you just keep doing this over time, then, of course, you run out. You don't save anything, and you mortgage the future. Certainly, as New Democrats we believe that by capturing an adequate royalty cut for our province, we would be able to actually save and wean ourselves out of using nonrenewable energy resources to pay for operational activities of the provincial government.

When we look at these estimates, we're seeing additional price tags attached to our already poor royalty regimes. If we take far less from the companies than we should, then we have to pay them to get it to market. I mean, that's a cost that oil companies should be paying for extracting a resource that, in fact, belongs to all Albertans. Simply put, this budget line is another example of a poor planning process.

Another one, I guess, is in regard to health care, \$345 million: \$209 million of it new, \$136 million of it savings from other programs. You know, it's just really very concerning for me to see that – say, for example, the Alberta Medical Association agreement ended up with \$150 million more than anticipated, right? It didn't hold the line at all, really, with doctors. Well, they've been trying to sell this idea of zero per cent to the other public-sector workers. So the whole thing just doesn't seem to add up, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, in the interim we have received the global budget for 2014. I just wanted to put a cautionary word in. Please, let's try to make the careful and reasonable presumptions about the growth of our economy, the growth of the population, and not shortchange these essential services that we are all responsible for here in this House.

Again, the supplementary supply addition to Advanced Education, \$53 million, with most of it, \$50 million, for enrolment pressures, it says. Obviously, we knew that these additional students were going into the advanced education institutions. Then why would we have cut \$147 million last year and undergone all of that pain and transition and confusion and layoffs and then have to put the money back anyway? You know, the whole thing just seems like an exercise in perhaps trying to do something else, maybe trying to make a tax on the people who actually deliver

these services. Otherwise, it just seems more like an outrageous display of lack of planning.

Recently the Alberta New Democrats brought attention to a draft report from the U of A, the University of Alberta, that highlights just how damaging this strategy has been. By returning only part of the funding – right? – and then doing that halfway through the semester, they had to lay off staff and not do the maintenance and program development that the institution did require. Our universities, researchers, and students, Mr. Chair, deserve better than what this PC government has been delivering. Without a long-term commitment to secure funding, then we just won't see any different.

This supplementary supply: hopefully, it's not the microcosm for the larger global budget that we will be going through here in these next few weeks. I think that always we should try to learn from our mistakes and try to develop a better strategy for budgeting that involves long-term planning, that involves the revenue side of budgeting and not just the spending, and one that people can count on so that each of the thousands of people who actually build budgets out of this very large sum of money can actually know how much they have and where they will go with it and build a budget and a program that's commensurate with a growing economy and a growing population.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The committee shall now rise and report.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I assume you're willing to move to rise and report?

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 1, Bill 3, and Bill 2.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

(continued)

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Anderson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, thank you. I'm pleased to rise and speak at second to the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014. It's my opportunity, I guess, to add my sense that this is a government that's adrift, that is prepared to sell the future. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: There's a gentleman over there with pink hair that keeps making comments. I'm wondering if he's part of the drag scene. Whether or not he's part of the drag scene, I take his comments very seriously.

All too easily, Mr. Speaker, we focus on the here and now and crisis to crisis. A government that has been in for 43 years, unfortunately, is prone to this, looking much more closely and fearfully at its future, recognizing its decades now of close connection to the corporate sector and its dependence on the corporate sector for its campaign finances and its policy development, that has been so heavily influenced by the corporate sector.

5:00

It has lost its vision. It has lost its connection to the people and the long-term public interest. So we see a bill here, an appropriation bill that – no, it's not the entire budget, but it reflects, I guess, some of the concerns that all of us have on this side of the House, that we are making decisions, again, at breakneck speed without a thought for the long-term public interest.

Not enough heat has been placed on this Finance minister and Premier to show us not the money but to show us the vision. Where is this province going? Where is the concern about the kind of society that many of us believe is still possible, where we share and care and develop in a responsible way the resources that are our bounty? Where are the values in our employee relations and public services that shaped the early years of this government? Where is the sense that we're going to address the growing inequality in our society and the barely met needs of our most vulnerable? And where is the sense that we will look honestly and fairly at a tax system that serves all Albertans?

How are we going to move to a culture of health and healing among ourselves, our neighbours, our planet? Do we have the resources as government to properly plan our energy future? Environmental sustainability can create the social conditions – the social conditions – for peace and responsibility in all our citizens. It's been entirely absent from many of the discussions and, certainly, the budget itself and this interim supply.

Without a vision the people perish, Mr. Speaker. It's a commonly used phrase out of the Old Testament, and it's true that we have seen civilization after civilization relegated to the dust heap and extinction as a result of a very consistent pattern of power corrupting and power interfering with the vision of a government. We're seeing the evidence of that again here.

Financial management surely is a reflection of values and vision, and for many of us it's seriously derelict in this province. How is it that after 60 years of active oil and gas development and now with prices well over the '80s and '90s, we've spent everything and are going into debt? We've learned nothing from history, from other countries, even from our own experts, because the politics of prosperity trump everything. Maybe I should say that the politics of boom and bust have trumped everything.

It's easy to say that there's a vision in Alberta because this government talks about a healthy people and a healthy province, but where are the independent measures to say and to prove that we are failing in this? Increasingly, people are suffering from preventable mental and physical illness, social disintegration, growing inequity, environmental mismanagement without accountability due to the lack of resources committed to ongoing monitoring and enforcement of good standards. Lougheed said it well. Slow down the oil sands to meet their cleanup responsibilities. Let them develop only at the level that they're prepared to clean up after themselves, a basic kindergarten tried-and-true principle of living.

Provide the owners of the resource with their share. Move towards new technology, conservation, and renewable as if you meant it. Eliminate our coal-fired power damages, that are going on year after year after year as we still require 60 per cent of our energy through coal, a 19th-century energy source, when we have such great clean opportunities.

We've learned nothing from our several trips by this government to Norway. The previous ministers have gone to Norway and come back with interesting stories to tell and great lessons and admiration for the massive savings fund that they've developed.

Nothing changes because we do it the Alberta way. We have a unique approach to financial management and to planning for our future. Where is the long-term public interest? I'm talking not only about the financial public interest but the human capital, the social capital, and the environmental capital, that we continue to ignore at our peril.

When are we going to move to a balanced budget on our environment, with no net loss of environmental capacity, environmental quality, instead of settling for progressive contamination of our water and overextraction of our water with, in some cases, injection into deep formations, where it's lost forever? This is not the kind of thinking that even our First Nations have shown. Their seven-generation planning is responsible and appropriate. Short-term thinking and private interests continue to trump long-term financial planning and the interests of the earth.

The bottom line, I guess, is the question: what standards will we strive to achieve? What part will government, the private sector, and the nonprofit sectors play in our future? When are going to have that discussion and open it up and engage the public in seriously thinking about a resetting of the agenda here in this province? Many groups are calling, and some have given up because this government just continues to go down the same path it's always gone down.

Mr. Dorward: Not a bad path.

Dr. Swann: Not a bad path? It's easy to say that with \$100-a-barrel oil.

We have not addressed the long-term interests and debt that we are incurring without a bigger vision and a better engagement and more trust, I guess. A part of this, obviously, is that we've lost the trust of many in our society, and more and more people are simply thinking about themselves. There's a growing selfishness, a growing insecurity, a growing fear that individuals, families, and

organizations have to fight for everything they're going to get because there isn't a bigger engagement and a thoughtful approach to a bigger vision for our province.

In fact, we haven't had that necessary discussion between government, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector to decide who is going to do what and how we can support each other in doing what we do best. Indeed, how are we going to engage our First Nations in a more meaningful way so that they feel an integral part of our future and have a sense that their financial future is also going to be protected? We need to get on with it. We need to make the bigger vision and the planning and the accountability measures a priority before the conditions that we have set in place lead to not only our own increasing health problems and social disruption but also our future generations having extremely limited options.

As a famous business executive said: we need to shift from the urgent to the important. We need to think of our finances in terms of not only the return on investment this quarter and this year and whether or not the budget is balanced this year but on insuring that the long-term interests of all of us and the planet are being addressed. I don't see that changing very soon, especially with a divided Tory party that now dominates the Legislature and is competing with each other about who can have the lowest taxes and who can cut services and planning for the long term, again, catering primarily to our dominate industry, that needs to be brought into check and managed to balance with other important priorities.

5:10

So, Mr. Speaker, I have made my comments. I think the interim supply, Bill 5, continues on a pattern of unhealthy and potentially severely damaging priorities and is not serving our children and our children's children, and I will not be supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to the introduction of guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce a trustee with the Red Deer school board and, more importantly, my big brother. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a couple of comments with regard to the Bill 5, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014.

My understanding of this from previous occasions is that the purpose of this is fundamentally about accountability, so I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View making those larger remarks, that we do need to recognize, whenever we are allocating any funds – it's interesting, though. I looked at the past few years of appropriation interim supply numbers, and if you roughly estimate the growth of interim supply in direct relation to the population and the economic growth of the province, then this document actually does reflect that reality much better than our global budget that we just saw introduced last week.

I know through this information that you, this government, know that the population is growing and the economy is growing, and I can see that pretty much directly reflected in this interim supply document. But then I don't see it with the much larger, more fundamental document, which is the budget. So again, it's back to what I was saying just previously about not recognizing what is so plain on our faces, which is the reality of the growth of our economy and our population. It's even calculated in the budget from last Thursday. If you do a combination – people can debate about the actual number, but I mean around 5 per cent if you combine economic growth and population – the budget came in under that, at about 3 to 3.5 per cent of that.

You're already setting yourself up for failure, where you're not going to meet the requirements or the responsibilities of governance in the province of Alberta. So we come back and we get the money that we need in the interim supply. I think it's about \$429 million more than last year, which seems like a lot of money, but it really does kind of reflect a general growth pattern in interim supply, which is commensurate with population and economic growth. Isn't that interesting? I just wanted to point that out, that you know and we know that the large budgets that we've been putting out in the last two years do not meet the reality of this province. They don't face the actual requirements, yet the

smaller, still significant but smaller, budget interim supply document in fact does do that. So that's kind of an interesting anomaly, but this room is often filled with such ironies and confusion for people to ponder as to what the purpose of those confusions might be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. Are there any other speakers?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the minister to close debate.

Mr. Denis: I would move that we close debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, my apologies. I did ask the wrong question. The motion should be for second reading of Bill 5.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I'd ask you once more to clarify what you intended, that I might have misinterpreted.

Mr. Denis: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me. I would move second reading of Bill 5.

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

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 7:30 p.m. this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, March 11, 2014

Issue 7e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 11, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4 Estate Administration Act

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Saskiw]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. What stage of reading are we in with this bill? Second? Well, that's a relief. By the way things happened this afternoon, I was kind of expecting to come in and find that it had gone to fourth, some new stage of reading.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if any of the staff that worked on this bill are in the galleries. No? Okay. Well, I just want to put forward a thank you and compliments to staff who have worked on this particular project for an extended period of time because I think they've done a really nice job. Many of us in this House have probably been executors or are expecting to be executors of estates soonish, and I have to say that I really appreciate what was done here to make this much more user-friendly in the way you walk through it.

The very first thing that I noticed was a section where it said, "Here is what you're expected to do: one, two, three," which is very helpful because I've been trying to do my homework in advance and going: okay; what do I do on the big day? It was really confusing because I was pulling information from vital statistics and from — I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm debating Bill 4, Estate Administration Act. You looked a little puzzled.

The Deputy Speaker: No.

Ms Blakeman: And here it is. In section 7 on page 8 of the bill it says: "Core tasks."

The core tasks of a personal representative when administering an estate are

(a) to identify the estate assets and liabilities,

Okay. I got that.

(b) to administer and manage the estate,

All right. Pretty straightforward.

(c) to satisfy the debts and obligations of the estate, and

Yeah. Okay.

(d) to distribute and account for the administration of the estate.

Well, thank you. That's pretty plain. It's pretty obvious what I'm supposed to do.

In another area they say: "Okay. Here's the way we expect you to" — not act but, you know — "take responsibility." Of course, that one is not going to pop into my hands like the last one did — I'm just paging madly here — but it basically said: you know, you're expected to be as though you were in this person's shoes. Sorry. I'm just going to madly look for the section because it is really good. It makes it clear that they're standing in the shoes of the person. They have a fiduciary duty, in other words, and they make that really clear.

Fiduciary responsibility. To lots of people: what the heck is that? "Fiduciary" sounds basically like "fidelity." I don't know. Maybe it's about brothers and sisters or something. So most people don't understand what that is, and it's not because they're in any way lacking in any intelligence or schooling. It's because it's not a term that is generally used in everyday life. This sets out the way people are expected to approach the business of what they're doing. Again, I think: nice stuff, nicely done.

The first half of the act is written in a way that's very straightforward, very frank. You know, you have to be on the inside team to understand this stuff, all the lawyer-speak. We all love lawyers — I know we do — but honestly they do speak funny. They've got all these code words, and nobody else knows what that means, so it's sort of a relief when all of that is taken out.

One of the other things that they've made very clear in this is that they've moved away from expecting that the executor would be a lawyer. You know, you think about all the old books and movies that you've seen, and there was the crusty but gentle family lawyer that was in the town law office. "He administered my grandpappy's will and my pappy's will, and he's going to do my will." That's no longer an expectation. As I've said, most of us in this House have probably been named as an executor for someone we're close to to administer their estate, or we may be. I mean, we're all leaders here, and people look to us and say: "Well, you've got it together. Guess what? You get to do this one."

They've moved ahead. They've come with the times, which is a really nice way of reviewing and updating legislation. Unhappily, I'm not able to always say that about the way government updates their legislation, but this, I think, has been done in a really nice way. It's intended for the normal person on the street to use, and it's written out very nicely that way. It gives them exactly what they're supposed to do.

Now, in the second part they get into the nitty-gritty, inside-baseball, lawyer talk, and there's also a really interesting section where it says: you know, if you're a professional, we're going to hold you to a higher standard. Okay. Yeah, that makes perfect sense. Section 7(3). No, that cannot be. There is no 7(3). Okay. Not my best notes.

But they do recognize that professionals know more about this, and they are held to a higher standard, and they should be bringing that into play with what they're doing.

An Hon. Member: Section 5.

Ms Blakeman: Section 5? Thank you. Well, thank you very much. Somebody is reading along at home.

Section 5. Yes. Here we go:

General duties of a personal representative

5(1) A personal representative must

(a) perform the role of personal representative.

That means the executor, but it's no longer expected to be a lawyer. It's a personal representative. It's you. It's me. It's your aunt. You know, I had dinner with a friend the other night, and he had just finished being executor for his aunt. It's made it more along the lines of what people are doing in everyday life.

They're expected to perform this

(i) honestly and in good faith.

They're expected to do this

(ii) in accordance with the testator's intentions and with the will, if a valid will exists, and,

- (iii) with the care, diligence and skill that a person of ordinary prudence would exercise in comparable circumstances where a fiduciary relationship exists.

Okay. Well, they slid a bit over the side on that one.

and

- (b) distribute the estate as soon as practicable.

Again, you know, this is the section I was talking about, where it kind of sets out how you're expected to act. If I can just draw a comparison, Mr. Speaker, this is the sort of thing that I was disappointed does not appear with the same kind of robustness and detail in our very own Conflicts of Interest Act, which is supposed to be governing our behaviour as MLAs.

Now, I'll remind everyone here that we do not have a code of conduct, so nothing sets out the way we're supposed to behave, and I was really frustrated with the Conflicts of Interest Act because we couldn't even get my hon. colleagues opposite to agree that we should obey the law and that we should be honest. We couldn't get them to put that into the act. But here it is turning up in the Estate Administration Act, so somebody clearly thinks along the same lines, that it's worth while to put it in there saying: "You know, you're to behave honestly about this. Don't cheat. Don't fool around with this stuff. It's important." I really like that.

Here we go. Section 5(3), appearing at the top of page 8, does go:

If because of a personal representative's profession, occupation or business, the personal representative possesses or ought to possess a particular degree of skill that is relevant to the performance of the role . . .

blah, blah, blah, they will be expected to

. . . exercise that greater degree of skill.

Tah-dah. That's pretty straightforward if you take out all the blah-blah-blah stuff in between. It does place that higher expectation on someone with a particular expertise in this area. It's very clearly written out. And for those with a very particular expertise, you can go to the second half of the bill, where they really get into it, into sort of the technical matters, that if this happens and that happens, then this is what you should do.

I actually learned something new in reading this. I did not know that debts are also passed on. When we got into the section about if there's a mortgage and there are jointly owned obligations, how all of that works itself out but, in fact, consistent with the idea that beneficiaries also inherit the debt – and here I'm looking towards my literary-minded colleagues – I was reminded: what is the Charles Dickens novel in which they all wait for the will to be settled? They wait and they wait, and they keep going back, and generations of people have waited for the will to be settled. Finally, they're all called back into court one day, and the judge announces that there's nothing left in the estate. The lawyers have used it all. [interjections] It'll come to somebody, and we'll just inject it into *Hansard* at some point down the line.

You know, in that one, once the money ran out, they drew the line and said: "Okay. It's over. There's no more money. You're all gone." But they didn't let the lawyers actually run over and spend more money than what there was and create a debt that people had to pay off. That was a new thing that I learned, and I'm glad I learned it.

7:40

All in all, I'm quite happy with this. I was deeply suspicious in my usual style, which, you know, you've got to admit, I had good reason to be over the years here, and duly went through line by line comparing the Administration of Estates Act and the Devolution of Real Property Act and checking everything out. "Oh, my goodness, the minors have disappeared. What have they

done to them? They've dropped them in a hole somewhere," which they didn't, by the way. Don't worry about it. They just took them out because they have a Minors' Property Act, and they deal with them there.

Contrary to what usually happens here, there was nothing nefarious that I can find, and if I do in the future, I will beat you over the head with a copy of the act. But it's really nice work. My thanks to the staff of the Solicitor General, the Minister of Justice, who has done this work. It looks like it happened over quite a period of time. You know, God bless him. This was really good work and the kind of work that I know our civil servants do for us all the time. Frankly, they made you guys look really good on this one, so you should be appreciative of that. As far as I can tell, they didn't give me any holes where I can get a piece of two-by-four out of it and whack you over the head because you did dumb things. Well done.

Thank you very much. Happy to speak in second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 4. As with my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, I'm scrambling a bit since things that we had thought were happening tonight happened much faster this afternoon. We are not operating on the schedule that we had last been apprised of, so just trying to get caught up here.

This Estate Administration Act arises from the report of the Alberta Law Reform Institute from 2013, and it appears to include almost all of the recommendations that were included in that report. Understanding and respecting the work that is done by the Alberta Law Reform Institute, I have no doubt that many of the changes in here are very worth while. That's good. We know that they are attempting to clarify some of the obligations and the expectations of executors and also administrators under the Estate Administration Act.

Because we are sort of in the midst of trying to consolidate our research on this act, at this point I have just a few questions that I'm going to put out there, and hopefully I will receive some clarification as this bill makes its way through the Legislature. Now, while it's good that we are clarifying the role and the obligations of the executors, I am curious as to whether we may or may not through this act be potentially raising the bar in terms of what they're required to do and what they're expected to do and the liability that they may be held to as a result. I'm getting the shaking head from some members that that's not what will happen although it does, certainly, very clearly lay out the fiduciary duty of the executor, and it lays out some clear obligations of the executor.

The concern I have, like the Member for Edmonton-Centre, is that I, too, have been drawn into being an executor more often than I would like. It seems that one downside to being the only member of the family who's made it through law school is that everybody thinks that you're the natural executor for every familial estate, which, you know, is what it is. The point is that that's not always the case. Many people are asked to be executors without that background. It is a complex and also a trying time in people's lives, and we need to make sure that while we clarify their role and we ensure that the legislation is clear in terms of what the expectation of them is, we also ensure that we do not put too much on their shoulders or establish a system that compels them to go out and seek more legal advice or to get legal advice in

order to navigate their way through the courts. I think we know that that is not a process we need to encourage as access to justice continues to be a major issue in our judicial system, and not everybody has the ability to hire counsel to help them navigate their way through the executor process.

However, that being said, knowing that this does come from a very thoughtful consideration by the Alberta Law Reform Institute and understanding, as I've been advised at this point, anyway, that this almost completely follows those recommendations, I suspect that there is very little that is not good in this piece of legislation.

I look forward to receiving just a little bit of extra information from the minister in charge around the obligations and/or liabilities of the executor or administrator under this legislation, whether there is any risk of that particular person being held to a standard which they may not necessarily be able to meet. I look forward to hearing that information. Otherwise, at this point those are my comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any other speakers?

Then I'd ask the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to close debate if she chooses.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to close debate on Bill 4.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Oberle]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you wish to speak?

Ms Blakeman: As soon as I can find the notes on my computer. Maybe somebody else would like to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to speak tonight?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Speaking to the throne speech, I take it. Yes? Okay. Great.

Thanks very much. Well, as usual, I have – well, it's handy when I have some version of the throne speech to speak to, if you don't mind. Oh, maybe this is my stuff. Okay. Yeah, the throne speech.

You know, I counsel my less long-toothed colleagues that throne speeches and budget speeches are not about the opposition; they're about the government. They all look smug and swan

around with flowers in their boutonnières. It's their day, and you've just got to grit your teeth and kind of get through it.

7:50

This is now our opportunity to have a chance to talk about it. Traditionally, people talk about their constituency. As you know, I have the best constituency because I have the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. It is the best. I am so happy to serve these wonderful people, who keep me on my toes and send me letters and stop me in the bank lineup and parking lots and come down here and watch what's going on. I am so blessed to be able to represent those people and, by the way, most of the people sitting in this Assembly because a lot of them have their out-of-town condos in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'm always happy to recommend restaurants or theatres or particular plays to go to. If anyone is interested, just send me a note.

What I would like to do is sort of divide this into three parts. I'd like to do a quick review of what was promised in the 2012 election and the throne speech to where we are now, what was not in the 2014 throne speech that I expected to see, and what is in there that I'm not – the bullet says: end on a happy note. Okay. So what's in the 2014 throne speech that I don't want to hurt someone about?

I do represent the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, which includes Queen Mary Park; Central McDougall; the traditional downtown area, which also includes a special designated warehouse section that's growing and becoming ever more cool to live in; Grandin downtown; Rosedale; and Oliver. I have about 48 and a half thousand people now. It's actually growing faster and faster because they keep popping up new condos and more people move in. About 98 per cent of my constituents live in multifamily units: townhouses, apartments, condominiums, life leases, lofts. Two per cent of my constituents live in single-family houses. I think I have under 500 houses now, and that drops every election.

I've got six schools. The two high schools are both unique and much loved. There's St. Joseph high school, which reinvented itself about a decade ago into a self-paced learner. What they ended up getting, which I think surprised them – but they have just leaped ahead with it – were a lot of very bright students that wanted the self-paced so that they could just blow through this stuff. They now have an IB program in there and are just doing amazing things. Plus they're running Jean Forest as part of it, which is the Catholic girls-only school. It is also run in that building and is part of that school, a very strong faith-based delivery of programming, and they all seem really happy to be there.

I also have Victoria school, which, of course, is the special arts school, which is a never-ending treat and a slight irony to me because my father retired from Victoria school, and at the end he spent the last couple of years tearing down the specialized vocational parts of that school in order to help create the arts school. He was tearing down the reason he came into teaching to make way for that arts school, which was what his daughter was making her living doing. Of course, we all know how wonderful Victoria school is.

Then we have Oliver school, which has as its junior high the Nellie McClung all-girls program, and Grandin school, which is now French immersion and Spanish immersion and full to bursting.

John A. McDougall school: I always send out my heartfelt thank you to the staff that work in that school. They work so hard with quite challenging, unique, bright, fun, and sometimes harder-

to-love kids and do their utmost to make those kids thrive. I have such admiration for them.

I also have St. Catherine's, which is sort of our multicultural school. It's also under the separate school board. You go in there, and there is one blond kid and 500 kids that have dark hair of many different colours. So it's a pretty cool place to be. They're really up on ESL and kids from the diaspora who just moved here from other places or have been in refugee camps for years and years. They're a really wonderful school. I also have Centre High and Metro and NorQuest and MacEwan University and Alberta College and the enterprise centre, so I've got part of the U of A.

As you've heard me talk about many times, I have a queer community that is just wonderful. Artists, hospitality and service workers, municipal and provincial civil servants – and I hope the ones that did Bill 4 are part of mine because I like to have great people in my constituency – professionals, entrepreneurs, students, seniors. I have a larger-than-normal percentage of seniors. I think I have a little over 12 per cent, which is by no means the highest but more than most people have.

I have quite an ethnic diaspora of urban aboriginal and First Nations people and a lot of people who need services: the mentally ill; people with mobility challenges; AISH; income support; WCB; pensioners; high-risk, high-needs, addicted street people; very, very few children. I have very, very, very wealthy people and very, very, very poor people.

As you can tell, I have a very diverse community, so I really get a chance to look at all parts of things when I'm working on behalf of my constituents. One of the things that I believe was promised and did not happen is removing the offending section 11.1 out of the Human Rights Act and thereby restoring full protections and respect and dignity to the LGBTQ community; in other words, removing that parental rights section that ended up in the Human Rights Act. That just continues to be so offensive to me, and I hold it against you all so hard. It's something that I believe you need to fix, and I will continue to stay on you until you fix it.

Ms Notley: I'm sure it wasn't promised to be fixed.

Ms Blakeman: I thought it was promised.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: I'm just sharing with the other members. As you know, I like to engage everyone.

That is a section they gave with one hand and took away with another in trying to amend the Human Rights Act and include the prohibition against discrimination based on sexual orientation. So they put that into the act, and then they took it away in practically the next page by saying: by the way, you can make sure that your children are never exposed to a single word of anything about people who have a different sexual orientation than you. It's just a horrible, horrible, nasty, awful, evil, backward thing that was done there, and you must fix it.

8:00

The other thing that we continue to not embrace or understand is transgender rights. I know it's a struggle for people. Still, you have to understand that some of the things that seem really straightforward for other people – so you're going to go for a pre-employment test; I still find it foul and, I think, unconstitutional to

say to someone: well, I think I might hire you, but first I want you to go through a physical. Well, if you take someone who's transgendered and not out – and why should they be when that's nobody else's business? – and you send them for a physical and they say, "Okay; well, you know, strip down, and let's have a little squat here," that's going to be outing someone. As soon as they say, "No, I don't think I want to do that," then the companies which have sprung up now to do this physical testing on behalf of all these companies that insist on it pre-employment say: "Oh, well, then you refuse to complete the test. That's it. We can't give you an okay on that one, so you're not going to get hired."

There are things like that that this government has not come to terms with or come to a place of understanding on, and they still cause people discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Transgendered individuals is one of the places where you're making this mistake over and over again. So you've got to fix that one.

My colleague has been working hard so that if schools ask for gay-straight alliances, it should be mandatory that they get the support once they've asked for it. I think that's a very good way to do it. I think that's right. If the kids get together and say, "Yeah, we want to do this," then it should click in that it's mandatory to give them the support to do it. Don't make them fight for all of that stuff. You know what? When kids like that have to fight every goddamn step for everything, what do you create? You create me, and I would bet that you people over there don't really want more like me. I had to fight every single thing, every antiwomen, antigirl stupid rule and assumption from the day I was 14 on. If you do that to people, you create lifelong rabble-rousers and troublemakers. So if you don't want that, maybe you should get on this one.

I notice that I've now made introducing the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose such a normal thing in the Alberta Legislature that the minister wants to hop on the bandwagon, so she introduced the court this year. I was really miffed because I thought: oh, you know, that's my gig, and those are my people. The member for Strathcona has done that as well. Then somebody said: well, you've just made it so normal that it's safe for the minister to go ahead and do it. I thought: yeah, that's actually right. All right. It is progress.

Other things that I think were promised or should be fixed. This one actually wasn't promised, but you should fix the Family Law Act. Take out that regressive, archaic, backwards, last-century language that continues to distinguish based on old role models: mother-father or husband-wife. Stop doing that. Stop it. It is parent-parent or spouse-spouse. It doesn't matter. In the law now it doesn't matter. But by insisting on using that designated language, you create a situation where people have to go to court. If you're not the official mother according to the language – I've got little air quotes with my fingers here – then you have to go to court and adopt the child and go through money and time and a whole bunch of stuff that you really didn't need to do because you are the mother of this child. You are the one that stands in that place and says: I am the parent of this child.

Get rid of that language. I mean, come on. I stood here for an entire afternoon and moved amendment after amendment after amendment to try and get that language out of this act the first time it came in here, and you voted me down over and over and over again. So don't think that yesterday is the first time I've had y'all vote against me. I've got a lot of practice at this, and I'm right. I was right then, and I'm right now, and I was right yesterday. So that should be done.

Funding of the arts. You know, same pie, more forks.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Ms Notley: Coming from the not fabulous but indeed the best constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona, where there are many, many arts, I am truly interested to hear what the Member for Edmonton-Centre has to say about the need for better arts funding in this province. I'm wondering if she could tell me what her thoughts are on that.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Edmonton-Strathcona. Well, as I said: same pie, more forks. There has been no increase in the funding to the arts, which actually means there has been a decrease in the funding to the arts because there has been no commensurate cost of living increase or inflationary increase, so they have less money. I've talked about this a lot in this House. This is an industry or a sector that creates jobs for less money than any other sector can create a job for, that contributes to a better quality of life for everybody. Their money stays here in their home communities. They don't take it somewhere else. We are prohibited from growth now because you can't get larger as a company if your grants aren't commensurate with that. We've corralled or muzzled everybody. They all have to stay the same size. No one can get a bigger share of that pie because it just takes more of it away from someone else.

We have the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. I noticed in the plan – it's doing yet another plan, which makes me want to scream. I think we're now on plan 3 or plan 4. Obviously, the approach is: if we don't have any money and we're not going to get any more money to put into the arts, then we'll have another plan. We've had the blueprint. We've had some sort of spirit plan. The executive director went off and did a year's worth of something or another to come up with another plan, a four-point plan or something. See? I can't even remember the names of the plans anymore.

Now we've got another one in here that is yet another plan. There is some money or an intention there to, you know, go out and find more ways to make the arts sustainable. Arts have never been sustainable. They're never going to be sustainable. They're part of our life here. If it wasn't the nobility that supported them, it was the church that supported them, and now it's the government that supports them. Why are you wasting time and money trying to find sustainability here? Just fund them and let them get on with it, and you'd have a much better life. They, by the way, are much better managers than a lot of the dumb things I see this government do, certainly better money managers than many of the things I see the private sector do.

The film studio. Fund the film studio, or get out of it. You know, \$5 million is not going to build that film studio. They are a large enough institution. Is it worth it? Absolutely. Would we get bigger and better and more films? Absolutely. No question about that. But there is no private sector entity that is going to come in and pick up the majority share of that one. It ain't going to happen, folks. That's why you don't have one in Calgary. That's why it's never happened there. We had it happen in Edmonton in an extraordinary time. When Super Channel was starting out, we had an individual that had the licence for that that started his own company, with government grants I might add, and at the time built the film studio that we have in Edmonton. That time is not going to come again. You are not going to get a film studio in Calgary unless you fund it, and my advice is: fund it. You will get a lot more payback from that than you will from many of the other schemes that the government gets involved with.

The Wild Rose Foundation is now gone, so the funding of volunteers is now turning up in the CIP and CFEP pool of lottery money. Once again: same pie, more forks. I notice with the flooding that there's money coming out of CIP for some of the flooding restoration and mitigation. Well, yeah. Same pie, even more forks or bigger forks. It's just very frustrating.

The human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism fund, which has sort of quietly gone off into a corner – I think it has a million bucks – is really needed, and it really needs an injection of money into that. As we have cultural communities that are starting to grow up and figure out how they're going to work with us and in this world, they need some access to money so they can do this stuff. One of those is the Africa Centre, a very good example of what can happen with that kind of support in Edmonton, but it's not done for nothing.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

8:10

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. I'm pleased to be able to rise to respond to the 2014 throne speech. Where to start with this? Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what we are dealing with in this province and what we have been dealing with to a greater and greater extent over the last few years is what we have been referring to as a tale of two Albertas. We have certain measurements that we can look at that make it look as though – and to some extent, you know, they are correct measurements, too; don't get me wrong – the province is growing in prosperity. But there are a growing number of alternative measurements which show that the majority of Albertans are starting to be left behind. We have two sets of rules in this province and two sets of states in this province in terms of who is truly enjoying the benefits of the great wealth, which, just to be clear, this government did not put there. The oil was there before they were elected.

Ms Blakeman: Dinosaurs died.

Ms Notley: They appear to be in many cases often as old as dinosaurs, but they aren't.

In fact, the resources that we have that we are sort of awkwardly, ineffectively, kind of stumbling towards capitalizing on were not put there by this government. Nonetheless, we do have great resources and the potential for great prosperity, but what we are doing is that we are failing every single day to share that prosperity in a way that will improve the livelihood of all Albertans in the best way possible. I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that by improving the livelihood and the opportunities and the future of all Albertans, even that very select few of very wealthy Albertans that these folks constantly have their eye on in terms of ensuring that they do what those folks want, even that group will do better. But this government doesn't see that, so we have a tale of two Albertas. In no place is it more appropriately reflected than in this throne speech.

Now, before we came back into the session, our caucus did a crossprovince tour, and we spoke to Albertans in a number of different cities across the province to find out what mattered to them. What we heard about was this growing inequality and this growing struggle to make ends meet and the fact that they had to work harder and longer and faster and that they were more stressed out trying to keep up with where they were just a few years ago and trying to keep up with where their parents were decades ago and at the same time worrying about how they were

going to have to run even faster and farther and harder to take care of their parents a decade from now, understanding, of course, that that's yet another area which we once could rely upon and now can no longer rely upon, that being the safe and secure retirement of our parents and grandparents. That's what we heard about.

Now, it's very interesting, Mr. Speaker. I saw a poll about two or three weeks ago that asked people whether they thought this government was on the wrong track or the right track. Interestingly, 70 per cent of people that were being polled said that this government was on the wrong track, and I think there's a good reason for why people are thinking that. A couple of years ago that party over there, in a Hail Mary attempt to maintain power, nominated a new leader, who then went out – and I don't really think she did it personally, quite frankly. I think she was just reading a script that some skilled campaign organizers around her gave her to read, but whatever. She elevated the expectations of Albertans around issues of shared prosperity, around issues of fairness, around issues of eliminating poverty, around issues of providing a bright future for our children. She or her strategists tapped into the fact that that's what Albertans were really looking for, so she dressed up like somebody that was going to provide them with that. Then she went out to people and said that that's what she was going to give them.

Ever since then, ever since April of 2012, when that election ended and people embraced that vision, they have been disappointed time and time and time again. That very vision which the government leader's strategists tapped into, that very wish that Albertans had for more equality, for more prosperity, for shared wealth, for more opportunity, that has been nothing but a disappointment, and you see that very, very clearly in this throne speech.

What we basically have in this throne speech is a lot of sort of vague language to say: "When it comes to programs that expand opportunities for all Albertans, we're going to basically do more of the same, except a little bit less of it as the population grows. But, hey, we're going to build lots of buildings."

Then over on the other side we have the Official Opposition, and they're lovely folks. I love sitting around chatting with them, and we get along, and they're a hoot. But I think we all understand that we don't necessarily agree on all of these things. Those folks are like, "You know what? We kind of agree with the suppressing of the programs for hope and the future and shared prosperity and all of that kind of stuff, but we'd also like you to not build buildings."

So it's like having these two dinosaurs sort of arguing over who gets to climb out of the tar pit first. You know, let the buildings fall apart, don't let the buildings fall apart, blah, blah, blah. That's the discussion we have, and nobody's talking about the fact that inequality is growing, that the gap between what women and men earn in this province is growing, that the number of people going into postsecondary education is dropping, that our class sizes are getting larger, and that families are having to work longer and harder and faster to get to the same place that they got to without having to do that just a few years ago. We're completely missing that part of it.

What were some of the things that I would've liked to have seen talked about in this throne speech to begin the process of truly reaching out to Albertans and giving them that sense that this government was actually interested in sharing the wealth over which they accidentally, you know, planted their tent? What were some of the things that they should have done? Well, obviously, I've talked about it before, and others have talked about it: child poverty. It was a promise made by the Premier; nothing has been done on it. I asked the Minister of Human Services why it was that

the very programs designed to help people get off income support – adult learning, adult upgrading, career training, all those things – were cut between 20 and 50 per cent? The minister said to me: Oh, well, you know, that money might still come if we ever negotiate an agreement with the federal government.

But here's the thing. You guys just got a billion-dollar windfall from the federal government. You only put \$600 million of it into Health. There's a whole other \$400 million that's floating around, yet somehow we still managed to bring in a budget that didn't ensure that we keep that money stable let alone cut it by anywhere from 20 to 50 per cent. So that's a choice, Mr. Speaker. That is a choice. This government makes choices, and that was a choice to betray that group of people, the very children that need to be taken out of poverty. Their parents need to be able to go to school in order to get out of poverty, and they can't.

It's interesting. I have a friend who's a teacher. I can't get into the details of this, but she tells me about how she and another colleague are actually themselves paying the monthly expenses of a young woman who is 17 years old and has a child, has finished high school, but doesn't have adequate education to get into postsecondary, so she needs to upgrade her high school. But to do that, there is no funding for her. None. She's not eligible for income support because she's already got her diploma. She's not eligible for postsecondary, for a student loan, because she can't get into postsecondary yet. So here she is desperately working to try to get herself out of poverty. She can't get that help. Her teachers are paying for her out of their pockets to help her pay her rent so that she can continue at school and upgrade her schooling and do that work. But that shouldn't be happening in a province like this. That's ridiculous, that that kind of thing is happening in a province like this, Mr. Speaker.

Health care. The Minister of Human Services said: well, what would you do to fix the problem around reporting child deaths? We talked a little bit about that, but then I said: you know, really, it's not about reporting children's deaths; it's about eliminating poverty, and what we need to do is bring in a child tax benefit to very quickly and efficiently bring up the income of those low-income families. We need to start dealing with mental health and addictions treatment plans. The paltry little bit of money that the government announced recently for it is just a drop in the bucket. I think anyone over there who cares about these issues knows and understands that. Yet we have a report that the government itself had to go out and ask to be done, which shows that this government is dropping the ball all over the place on mental health services. We are doing a profoundly crappy job on that issue, and it is primarily tied to the short-sighted, ridiculous decision to create AHS back in 2008, where we eliminated the Alberta Mental Health Board. We haven't been tracking what we've been doing on mental health ever since, and it's just a failure. And in so doing, we drove poverty, and we put more and more children and families at risk. So there's something where I would like to have seen some effort, some action to improve.

8:20

What else could we have done? Well, you know, we talk about university funding. Now, I appreciate that certain folks at very senior levels within the postsecondary sector have given grudging statements that maybe the sky will not fall quite yet, tomorrow, with this budget because they've been given access to their access to the future fund again. The freeze is off that, so they can now fund raise again in the corporate sector. You know, getting that was a great win, so they're going to play nice and say nice things.

The problem is that for the most part the major cuts to the operating grants of postsecondary institutions have not been

restored, and what that means is that access will decrease, quality will decrease, and our postsecondary institutions will continue to get decreasingly accessible to regular Albertans.

In the comprehensive institutional plan that was released by the University of Alberta in January, they talked about the impact of the cuts that were not remedied by the partial restoration of those cuts at the end of last year; they talked about potential catastrophic failure of some of their buildings because their maintenance was so far behind; they talked about losing the best students; they talked about losing the best professors; they talked about losing the best researchers because of the instability that was created and is being created in our postsecondary system by these draconian cuts by a government which is not interested in improving and growing the opportunities of Albertans and sharing the wealth and the prosperity of this province but rather is interested in creating an Americanized, commercialized postsecondary system which serves industry and industry only for a select group of elite students, and that's the end of it. That's their vision of postsecondary. It's a tremendous step backwards, and it is going to limit the opportunities of Albertans for generations to come, Mr. Speaker – generations to come.

Frankly, that's not addressed anywhere. Oh, yes. Here it was. "Your government will take the long view when it comes to investments in higher education." I guess that is Premier-speak for: we're going to cut lots and lots of funding and really restrict access to this institution. "Take the long view." I got quite a kick out of that one.

One of the other things that I'm very concerned about, as I mentioned before, is how we care for seniors in this province. Now, we have this ongoing debate on continuing care versus long-term care, and the government loves to say that we're growing continuing care beds. But, in fact, we all know that continuing care means a whole bunch of different things, and in many cases what it really means is inadequate care. At the same time the government is unprepared to invest in new places where standards of care – minimal standards of care, I will grant you, but still standards of care – exist when it comes to areas of long-term care. Meanwhile those areas are suffering greater and greater pressures. Their staff are getting burned out, their ability to provide care is being undercut, and we are moving more and more towards a commercialized, privatized form of seniors' care in this province.

You know, I had a friend tell me not too long ago that as she planned for retirement, as much as she's a stalwart – stalwart – supporter of public health care historically and in the future, part of her retirement planning is now to buy long-term care insurance because she believes that she has to plan for this government to abandon her and her family when she gets older. So now she's buying long-term care insurance. That's what you guys have done. You've opened a market for your friends in the long-term care insurance industry rather than actually building and improving seniors' care now and going forward. That's what's happening.

Meanwhile we have this horrible situation where the situation in many long-term care centres is deteriorating to such a point that the conflict . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Ms Blakeman: Well, that was kind of an abrupt ending. I'm wondering what the conflict was.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. The conflict between family members and care providers in these overstressed long-term care centres is growing daily because the care providers struggle to provide the care that is required and the families, rightfully, are stressed out and anxious about that. So now we have these Dickensian stories – perhaps not Dickensian; that's probably the wrong literary allusion – these very dramatic and sad stories of families being separated from one another and families being told that they are not allowed to visit their loved ones because they are disruptive. That is what it has come to. Families are being separated from seniors because this government has allowed the long-term care system to come into such crisis that these kinds of reactive policies come into place and everybody is hurt. Staff is hurt, families are hurt, and most importantly the seniors who reside in these care centres are hurt.

This is what this government's vision is. So to the extent that this throne speech says that the government will invest in better seniors' care, well, no they're not. They're not investing in it. They're reducing the number of long-term care spaces, they're not putting staff-to-patient ratios in place, and they're not building new, high-quality, low-cost, accessible places for seniors who require care. They're not. Meanwhile they're engaging in the most chaotic reorganization of home care. You know, you take something that's barely holding on, and then they decided they needed to reorganize it and contract it out to a bunch of corporations who are completely not equipped to provide the service, and you create even more chaos.

In my riding when I did my Christmas poinsettia tour – in December I went to 15 different centres in my riding where seniors live – I heard time after time after time again about how home-care services had decreased and how the quality of care accessible had decreased and how their quality of life had decreased as a result. This isn't me making it up and just waxing poetic because I like to beat up on you folks. I mean, I kind of do, but that's not it. I am telling you about what people told me as I visited them over the course of December.

And let me tell you, things are not getting better for any seniors. These are seniors in long-term care, seniors in lodges, seniors in assisted living, and seniors in seniors-only apartments. All across the board they are getting fewer services, and they are very stressed and very anxious, and it is your fault. It's as simple as that. You could deal with the issue or not deal with the issue. This throne speech is a recipe or a justification for not dealing with the issue. That's what we've got in here.

The last thing I'd like to say about the throne speech that also deals with conflict is that we have had a few bumps in the old international economic world because of our outrageously shameful record on the environment. What do we say in the throne speech about the environment? How are we going to improve our record and our reputation with our international markets? Here's what we're going to do. Through a new single energy regulator and a new environmental monitoring agency we're going to make Alberta more competitive.

Nowhere in there does it say that we are just thinking maybe – just as an aside, what the heck, little bit of a lark – that we're going to make our air and our water and our land cleaner, safer. Maybe – maybe – we might have wanted to just throw out a carrot to folks who were kind of interested in clean air, clean water, clean land. You know, maybe just a bit. But, no, no, no. Our environmental regulation is focused solely on making us more competitive. And you know what? It is making us more

competitive. Absolutely. But in the course of doing it, it's making us more competitive because unlike almost every other developed nation, we are prepared to sell out our air and our land and our water for a very, very cheap price.

Yeah, people who make money off being able to exploit an absence of standards, an absence of regulations, you're right, they may well come here a bit faster. But the long-term outcome for Albertans, not only in terms of our quality of life but also for our long-term economic health, is not a good one.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others that wish to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne?

Seeing none, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, did you wish to move adjournment?

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I believe you meant to move to adjourn debate on the throne speech?

Mr. Denis: Do you want to speak, Brian?

Mr. Mason: I have, but I'll do it again if you want.

Mr. Denis: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the authority to let the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood speak again, but I would move that we adjourn speaking on the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Olson: Well, it appears that we've done a lot of business today, Mr. Speaker, so I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:31 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 12, 2014

Issue 7a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 12, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Gracious Lord and Holy Creator, fill our hearts and minds with wisdom and with determination to always do what is right for our constituents, for our province, and for our country. And bless those brave men and women who served in peacekeeping missions, perhaps still are, those who returned, and those who gave their lives in place. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

13th Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we begin the rest of the Routine, I am reminded that we have five members today who are celebrating their 13th election anniversary as Members of this Legislative Assembly. Let me read their names, and then we can applaud them all: the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Congratulations to all of you.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many of you know, today marked the end of Canada's 12-year mission in Afghanistan, and as the ministerial liaison to the Canadian armed forces and the MLA for Edmonton Garrison it was truly a privilege to attend the flag-raising ceremony this morning at Guthrie school, where I was joined by several colleagues, the Premier, the Lieutenant Governor, troops, families, education stakeholders, students, and staff there. There will be a member's statement on this commemoration a little later today by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, but I wanted to introduce a few special guests that we have here with us this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four troops from the Canadian armed forces who have served in Afghanistan during these 12 years as well as the family of one – I see she's not here; we may have to revert later – who never made it home. All of these individuals demonstrate the strength and courage that it takes to serve this country, and I know that we are all eternally grateful for their sacrifice. I would ask these folks to please rise and remain standing as I say their names so that we can properly thank them: Major Stephane Pellerin, who has served six tours overseas, two in Afghanistan; Master Warrant Officer Robin Crane, seven tours overseas, three in Afghanistan; Sergeant Paul Rachynski, three tours overseas, all of which were in Afghanistan; and Master Corporal Caroline Brooks, who has one tour overseas in Afghanistan. Like I said, we have one family that's not here yet. I would ask your indulgence to revert later.

These folks are representative of the tens of thousands of Canadians that have served on this mission and made us very proud. I'd like to invite the Assembly to show our gratitude. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, hon. members, starting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you 115 students from A. Blair McPherson school, located in your constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. They're accompanied here today by their teachers, Tom Henderson, Barb Hennig, Rachel Day, and Jeff Neilson. They're seated in both galleries. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, students.
Edmonton-Centre, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I'll do both of my introductions at the same time. The first group that I would like to introduce is always a group that I'm very proud of, and that is the Careers in Transition section from NorQuest College, I believe. Today we're being joined by 10 students, and that includes their instructor, Allan Carlson. If I could get that group to rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. There they are. Thank you very much.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker, is a group that have come together and called themselves the blue university project. They are a group of students and community members who are taking action on water rights. They've organized a week of events for Edmonton Water Week at the University of Alberta from March 17 to 22. Their leader today, Nichole Batienco, has worked with me on my Motion 515 to have water declared as a public good. I would ask them, please, to rise as I say their names: Nichole Batienco, Tigest Mulugeta, Sheena Lukacs, Jennifer Novak, David Wolsey, and Caitlin Pettifor. If you would join me, please, in thanking them for their wonderful work on the environment.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, then let us move on with the Associate Minister of Public Safety and Recovery and Reconstruction for High River.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it's with humility and honour that I rise to introduce to you and through you Mr. Tom Sampson, executive officer with the Calgary fire department. Tom Sampson joined the Calgary fire department in 2009 to oversee the Emergency Management Agency and facilitate the building of the new emergency operations centre. During his tenure with CEMA he acted as the emergency operations centre manager addressing the devastating Slave Lake fires and subsequently received the Slave Lake medal of honour for his efforts. Tom was the acting director of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency during the unprecedented floods that we saw this last June.

Prior to working for CFD Tom was the chief of Calgary's emergency medical services, my boss. He worked to establish the Calgary regional EMS partnership, the chiefs of Alberta, and nationally the EMS Chiefs of Canada. He received the Alberta College of Paramedics award for excellence for his advocacy in paramedicine. Tom is a lifetime member of the board of EMS Chiefs of Canada and continues to maintain his registration as an advanced care paramedic. But, Mr. Speaker, the one accolade that is maybe not mentioned in his biography is his dedication to his family. I've always admired that. He is a friend and a mentor, and I'd ask him to rise today and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member in the seat occupied normally by Edmonton-Gold Bar, or is that Edmonton-Gold Bar himself? Yes, it is, indeed. Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, it's a bit breezy in here today. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful individuals that I'm honoured to introduce on this very special day. A little bit of poetry. Mrs. Christine McIver, the wife of the Minister of Infrastructure and chief executive officer of Kids Cancer Care Foundation, and Mr. Stu Reid, chief development officer of Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta, the foundation which I chose to raise money for during these last 11 months. Christine and Stuart are doing exceptional work for cancer research and care in this province, particularly with youth and children. It is great to see such dedicated and passionate people doing such important work for kids who suffer from this terrible, life-altering disease. Christine and Stu were present today as I shaved my lid for kids with cancer at Gabrielle-Roy school. It has been my privilege for 13 months to do my small part in growing my hair and raising awareness and money for wonderful organizations across our province. The government can't do it all. We all have to help in our little ways.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, the Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood MLA.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that I'm not sure which look I like best. But I know there's a pink wig out there somewhere.

It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of hard-working nurses from the Grey Nuns hospital emergency department. My guests are here today because they believe that two of the most important facets to a strong society are health care and education. I would now like my guests to rise as I call their names: Rob Kroetsch; Sarah Fitzgerald; Christine Maxwell; Tara MacNeil; Pat Mercer-Deadman, RN, who's the president of the emergency nurses of Alberta; Cassandra Garneau; and Alan Vandenbroek. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an amazing young couple. This young couple from Cypress-Medicine Hat have been early organizers, great strategists, and very hard workers for the Wildrose Party in the last few years. These two were and are critical to the Wildrose success in the south, and it's nice to see such young, principled, hard-working, and smart conservative values put into practice. I would invite Colin and Cheryl Phaff to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ron and Jeff Deeprise. I've known Ron and Jeff for most of my life. Ron is an engineer, and Jeff is a teacher. They came here today to see if the rumours are true and perhaps taste the winds of change blowing through these hallowed halls in these past days. If they could rise, please – and I will introduce them – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Minister of Education, your guests have now arrived?

Mr. J. Johnson: They have, Mr. Speaker, yes. Thank you for indulging me. We have the final group that we want to honour here. This is a tougher one to introduce. Lisa Schamehorn-Eades is here with her two daughters. I know Lisa well. She's been in this House before. She's an Albertan. She's the spouse of Sergeant Shawn Eades, who was killed in action in August 2008, from the Combat Engineer Regiment out of Edmonton here. She's here with her daughters, Breanna and Niya. I just saw them at the Guthrie school, where we had the ceremony. Lisa wears a medal that nobody wants to wear. It's the Memorial Silver Cross, which was established in 1919 for widows and mothers of fallen soldiers. We owe them a debt that we cannot repay, but these young ladies that are here with their mother can take comfort and pride in the fact that now, because of their father, there are 3 million girls in school in Afghanistan that were not there before he went. [Standing ovation]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Government Culture

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think today is a good day to talk about the culture of this government. The Premier is currently under heavy fire for her sense of entitlement and not without good reason. But let's dig a little deeper into how government works.

A government is a team. It's not one individual. Government is made up of MLAs, the caucus, and the cabinet. The Premier hand-picks her cabinet from her team of MLAs to run departments and to set the strategic objectives of the government. One of the key functions of caucus and, specifically, cabinet is to provide good advice to the Premier. Now, what kind of advice do you think you're going to get from a group that would use a taxpayer-funded aircraft to get to and from a PC Party fundraiser? You would think that as good advisers these cabinet ministers would have advised the Premier to not use the government plane and would have not used it themselves.

The bad advice and the bad conduct of this cabinet don't stop there, Mr. Speaker. Under their watch there has been a litany of expense scandals, from the Health ministry all the way down to the Tourism ministry, from jet-setting on a \$45,000 trip to South Africa to the \$100 million in executive expenses paid out by the Health minister.

Now, the rumours abound that the cabinet is unhappy with the Premier. They aren't pleased that she did the very things they taught her with their advice and their actions. They are looking to toss her under the bus for doing the very things and subscribing to the very same culture they are responsible for establishing. Apparently, they are concerned that if they don't do something, they might cease to be entitled to their entitlements. But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. A change in the occupant of the Premier's chair won't cut the rot out of this tired, out-of-touch government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government is attacking pensions for employees without justification and without

warning. Alberta's public-sector pension plans are among the most stable in North America, and independent analysis shows that they are well on their way to being fully funded. Yet the PCs are continuing to jeopardize the retirement security of more than 300,000 Albertans, who work hard every day to keep our seniors healthy, to keep our roads safe, and to protect vulnerable Albertans.

On January 1, 2016, public employees will start losing value from their pensions, that they've spent years paying into. A letter to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal* compared these changes to "a marathon runner reaching Mile 25 only to learn the finish line has been extended [by] several miles." Mr. Speaker, it isn't fair, it is not necessary, and it will make it much harder for our public sector to attract and to retain employees.

Two changes are particularly concerning. Imposing a contribution cap means that pensioners will always be at risk of losing their retirement income. Second, eliminating the guaranteed cost-of-living adjustments means imposing growing rates of poverty on seniors over the length of their retirements.

Mr. Speaker, this government should be working to make things better for Albertans, not worse. They should be looking to make retirement more secure, not less. Unfortunately, standing up for middle-class Albertans is not what this government does. That's why we need Alberta New Democrats, and in force.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I beg your indulgence for one more member's statement.

Calgary-Currie, please.

Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a privilege to rise today and an honour to note a significant milestone that took place today, at the end of Canada's 12-year mission in Afghanistan. During this time Canadian armed forces' troops performed beyond all expectations in an environment that was dangerous and fragile. Our troops have been trainers, coaches, teachers, and fighters, and through their entire mission they've displayed incredible character.

To honour this commitment and sacrifice, the province started the day by lowering all the flags in the province to half-mast. This act is one we took to remember those who did not come back from this mission, those who gave their lives to protect our country and improve the well-being of a nation on the other side of the world. Forty-six Albertans died while serving in Afghanistan, and many more were wounded or hurt. They were our neighbours, our fathers, our brothers and sisters, and they were all taken too soon. We lowered our flags to commemorate their sacrifice and let those who did return know that they're not alone.

Today is not just an opportunity to remember the sacrifices made by our soldiers; it is a chance for all of us to take a broad look at the world and see Canada's unique place in it. Our hon. Minister of Education encouraged schools around the province to follow the government's lead and lower their Canadian and Albertan flags to half-mast to begin the day and then raise them at noon. This was a unique opportunity for students to learn about history while it's happening, providing them with an opportunity to engage, reflect, and ask questions. Over the lunch hour today the hon. minister was joined by several colleagues at Guthrie school, and along with students, staff, stakeholders, troops and their families, they raised the flags to full height from half-mast.

I would like to close by saying how very grateful we are to all the men and women and parents who served for Canada and those

who made the ultimate sacrifice. May they rest in eternal peace and be always remembered.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought that was well said by the MLA for Calgary-Currie. I'm delighted to see the men and women in uniform here today and their families. We're honoured by your presence.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the Premier and two cabinet ministers boarded a government plane on October 25, 2012, to attend a PC fundraiser in Grande Prairie. The Health minister said that the use of the plane was legitimate because "we made an announcement" on the Grande Prairie hospital. Now, we've done some checking, and there was no government of Alberta press conference that day in Grande Prairie, just the Premier's \$250-per-ticket fundraiser, which the minister attended. To the minister: is he sure that the use of the plane that day was for legitimate government business?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I answered this question yesterday, and the answer that I provided yesterday stands. We did speak to the Grande Prairie hospital construction, which is very exciting for both the constituents of my colleague the Minister of Transportation and all citizens of the Grande Prairie area. There was a government-issued news release that day. There were a number of other announcements in the same week. In fact, this government announced six hospital expansions during the week of October 18.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the paper of record in Grande Prairie, the *Daily Herald-Tribune*, confirms that there was no government press conference, and the only announcement was a press release sent out at 4:02 p.m., while the Premier and her ministers were still in the air. Again to the Health minister: if there was no government of Alberta event or press conference or meeting in Grande Prairie that day, why did he take the government of Alberta plane?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to start by saying to all members of our Canadian Forces: thank you; duty well done.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister mentioned, during that week there were a number of announcements – Edson and Medicine Hat, I believe – around hospitals. This was one of those announcements around the hospitals, that was done in Grande Prairie. On that particular day, as the hon. members opposite would remember, there was a tragedy in St. Paul. There were a number of planes that were used to move people to and from that tragedy. This plane was delayed, unfortunately. However, there was also a PC Party charter plane that went up for all members who were not on government business.

The Speaker: The hon. leader, second supplemental. [interjections]
Hon. members, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition actually has the floor.

Please take it.

Ms Smith: Notwithstanding what the Finance minister said, it's pretty obvious that the only reason why the Premier and her ministers boarded the government plane that day was to attend the PC Party fundraiser. In addition to using taxpayer-funded aircraft to pick her up from holidays, the Premier and now her cabinet appear to believe that it's perfectly okay to use the government planes to travel to and from PC Party fundraisers. The Premier should stop the gross use of government aircraft and order the PC Party to reimburse taxpayers. Will she do it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that a number of things happen in this world. A lot of them are government business; some of them are party business. We keep government business and party business separate. We charter planes to go to party business. We use government planes to go to government business. In that week, as the Minister of Health said, there was a rollout of six hospital announcements, including a very important one in Grande Prairie, very important to the residents of Grande Prairie, very important to northern Alberta, a very important piece of government business.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there was no press conference, no announcement, no event. Let's see if the other members of the cabinet feel as brazen about this abuse of taxpayer dollars as the Premier and the Health minister do. I'd like to ask the Transportation minister, formerly the Infrastructure minister, who was on the plane out. Is it okay for taxpayers to subsidize the fundraising activities of the PC Party by providing free air transportation to and from PC Party fundraising events?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, this is almost ridiculous in this House, that they would use this kind of line of questioning to challenge our integrity or my judgment. I would put my integrity with anybody's over there.

I flew with the Health minister on that Saturday to Edson and High Prairie to make a similar announcement. Maybe they would rather we made the announcement at the PC fundraising dinner. That would have been wrong. We went up ahead of time to do a press release. You might have checked Twitter to find out that there was no press release. I was there in the press release. I can bring all kinds of citizens from Grande Prairie. I can . . .

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they don't need to fly a government airplane to Grande Prairie if all they're going to do is put out a press release.

Let's now ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs, formerly the Minister of Energy, how he feels about the situation, because he was on the plane back. If he were the Premier, would he think that it's okay for taxpayers to subsidize the PC Party this way, or would he recognize that this is wrong and pay the money back?

The Speaker: Hon. member, just be careful with questions that call for opinion. If someone wishes to respond from the bench on fact, that would be welcome, but no opinions, please. That's not in order.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the question has been asked and answered. There was government business that week announcing hospital projects right across the province, using the plane to go to a local area so local citizens can be part of the excitement of announcements that happen in their community. When we go to party business, we charter planes, and we take government members to that party business on chartered planes that are chartered

by the PC Party. It's been asked. It's been answered. It's clearly government business, and there is no reason for these hon. members . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Smith: The only way Grande Prairie residents would have been able to take part is if they went to the PC Party fundraiser that night, which means it was PC Party business, and they shouldn't have been using a government plane for it.

My question is to the associate minister of electricity, who was on the plane back from that fundraiser, too. She's the most junior minister in cabinet, but in a prior life she was an important oil company executive and a self-described expert on ethics. Does she have any reservations about the ethics of using taxpayer resources to help raise money for her political party, or has she, too, already been captured by the PC culture of entitlement?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this question has been asked and answered. The hon. member can say all she wants about PC business, but PC business isn't the business of the House. We keep that separate. They should keep that separate as well. The ministers went for government business, and they flew there on government business. The plane was delayed for very, very legitimate reasons. That's been asked and answered. It's not in those people's hands to determine what our ethics are. This group of people has a very high standard of ethics on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: If there's no government announcement, they should not be using government planes. End of story.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Ms Smith: Yesterday I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs if he would deal with the mess of the disaster recovery program by firing LandLink and creating a program that actually works. He answered by saying that when LandLink's contract comes to an end at the end of March, they will not be part of any future disaster recovery program. That's not as clear as I would like, so I'm going to ask the minister to clarify. Is LandLink completely done on March 31, or is he going to allow them to continue to revictimize flood victims for years by keeping these open files that drag on and on and on?

2:00

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, my answer stands from yesterday, and that answer is that LandLink will not be involved in any new DRP files going forward. The question that the member is asking: is LandLink involved in resolving outstanding files? The answer is that, yes, they are, and they're doing so with clear guidance from me to resolve them as quickly as possible, with the goal of having all residential DRP files resolved by the end of March – that's in three weeks; write it down – and it'll be there.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First sup.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. LandLink has been a man-made disaster for those who've had the bad luck to be struck by a natural disaster. Consider Sue Arlidge of Exshaw. Her home was severely flooded with silt by three different surges of creeks around Exshaw last June. Three different engineers' reports said that her house was structurally unfit. The MD of Bighorn issued her a demolition permit. Then the supposed experts at LandLink showed up and said that her house was fine, that it just needed

repairs. Now that LandLink is gone, how can Sue Arlidge and all the others like her get their cases reviewed?

Mr. Hughes: Well, as this hon. member knows well, we're working very hard. Many good public servants and others are working very hard to ensure that the 10,500 applications to the disaster recovery program are addressed in a manner that is fair and that is as speedy as possible. I have in fact cleared away many of the administrative hurdles to ensure that these cases are dealt with in a timely fashion. We all have a great deal of empathy and sympathy, and I want to ensure that we are able to deliver to people at the earliest possible date a resolution to their files so they can move on with life.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, please.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has called it a \$6 billion flood, but so far LandLink has flowed through only about \$22 million to the hardest hit homeowners in High River. Nine months after the flood more than half of the disaster relief claimants in High River have not had their files dealt with. Only 1 in 5 applicants has received their final payments and had their files closed. Now the minister tells us that he's going to have everything resolved in three weeks, which LandLink couldn't do in nine months. Now that LandLink is gone, what is the minister's plan to clear this backlog?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, some would have us completely throw out the whole process and create chaos, but actually LandLink has an important administrative role in ensuring that these files are dealt with appropriately over time and closed. Some 2,200 payments as of last Friday have been made to individuals in High River. There has been substantial movement in the last hundred days, and I think people understand that this is a very difficult time for a lot of people, and we're here to try and help ensure that their cases get resolved. I am open to hearing from people who are concerned about their particular files, and I welcome, if the hon. member has any files, her bringing them forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals thank the men and women of the armed forces and all their families for their sacrifices to humanity and to this country.

Government Airplane Usage

(continued)

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, we first had Donationgate. Then we had Travelgate. Now we have two in one, Donation-Travelgate. Yesterday we learned the Premier gave two of her ministers a free ride to Grande Prairie on Redforce One. Supposedly by sheer coincidence, there was some sort of drive-by hospital announcement outside the doors of the PC fundraiser. Okay. Let's pretend that's true. I still have a question. Why did you give five additional PC MLAs, who clearly were in town for the PC fundraiser, a free ride back home at taxpayers' expense on Redforce One?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's try to address the answer from the standpoint of government policy because, as you know, ques-

tions pertaining to political party fundraising are not on. So, please, I invite you to address this from that standpoint, and I'll ask future questioners to make sure that their question doesn't run into the foul territory.

The hon. minister.

Government Airplane Usage

(continued)

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarity. As the Deputy Premier has been saying, we do separate out the party business from the government business, and this is a clear case of that, actually. There was party transportation put on, paid for by the party, for any members who were not on government business. The members who were on the plane going up to Grande Prairie were on government business.

As to the policy, if you will, for the authorized use of the planes, that is at the discretion of the minister who authorized the plane. They can invite guests. They can invite family members. They can invite those people who are relevant to the duties that they're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this is policy. The Finance minister alleges that they're on government business, supposing it's true. But then yesterday he talked about deadhead flights. Truer words were never spoken when he talked about deadheads.

Mr. Speaker, three things are clear. The five PC hitchhiker MLAs clearly got a free ride home from the PC Party fundraiser, these hitchhikers clearly had no business being on Redforce One, and finally Alberta taxpayers deserve to get their money back. To the Premier or Finance minister: when will the PC Party pay Albertans back for these free rides?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to honour the comment that the hon. member made about flights that are used to reposition aircraft when they've been used to travel from one place to another and they need to come back to base. If the flight is empty coming back to base, that's what the industry calls it. Airlines have the same issue. We try to limit those.

Out of the nearly 4,000 flights that are logged over the last two years, which is the time period that the hon. members have been talking about, we do try to minimize the number of deadhead flights. We try to minimize the number of times that the schedule conflicts. However, Mr. Speaker, the policy that we have for the flights is that the minister who charts the plane says who's on it.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister should really listen. The question was: will his party pay the taxpayers their money back or not for the five hitchhikers?

Mr. Speaker, Don Braid wrote a very interesting article in the *Calgary Herald* on March 10. In it he reported that the Premier at a caucus meeting prior to the budget had "already said she won't repay \$45,000 [back] for her South Africa trip . . . because if she did, Wildrose would demand that the PCs repay everything." To the Premier: is what Mr. Braid wrote true? Are you refusing to pay back the \$45,000 you wasted out of fear that other members of your caucus will be . . .

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is getting to the absurdity now where he starts to read the newspaper to find out what supposedly went on at a Conservative caucus meeting and then asks questions in the House as though that was relevant to government policy and policy for governing this province. It shouldn't even be dignified with an answer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition. First main set of questions.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For years this PC government has been accused of using taxpayers' money to subsidize their partisan activities, going back to the days of Premier Klein. Recently a number of PC MLAs and cabinet ministers took a flight to attend a partisan event. They include the Minister of Infrastructure, now Transportation; the Health minister; intergovernmental affairs; Energy, now Municipal Affairs; and the associate minister of electricity. My question is to the Finance minister. Given that this was a fundraising party for the PC Party, what makes you think that you can use a government aircraft as your designated driver?

The Speaker: Hon. member, from the standpoint of government policy, please.

I'm going to remind members of what's allowed and what's not allowed shortly, but go ahead.

Mr. Horner: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In fact, for the party event, as I said, the party did put transportation on for government members who were not on government duty. The flight in question was for members who were on government duty. As I said before, the policy of the government – we do have a policy for the use of the air transportation service and the charter aircraft, which I have in my hands and which is readily available to many, many folks.

The authorization for category 1, 2, 3, 4 flights: I would actually say, Mr. Speaker, that one of the flights that was taken on that day was a category flight that is actually for emergencies, which was, as I said, to the incident in St. Paul, where we actually carried one of the hon. members of the opposition.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it doesn't matter what new face you may want to put on the PCs' packaging. It's too far past the best-before date. The government issued a media advisory for just 45 minutes after the plane landed in Grande Prairie, and it's wheels up, back to Edmonton before 10 the next day. It arrived at 16:32 – that's close to 4:30 – and left again at approximately 10 o'clock at night. Can the Finance minister explain what crucial government business was done on this trip to the partisan Tory fundraiser?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there were a number of items that were scheduled to happen that day in Grande Prairie, and the flights were to leave earlier than they did. The cause for the delay was that the Minister of Infrastructure at the time was asked to attend at a tragedy of a car accident at a school. The flight that he was on was the one that delayed the flight coming back. Obviously, these are the scheduling challenges that we have with transportation services on an ongoing basis. As I said, close to 2,000 flights a year, and we try to limit the number of times that we have these kinds of delays and these kinds of issues.

2:10

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the answer is that no government business was undertaken by any of the participants on that flight.

The entirety of this governing party deserves a share of the blame for this kind of behaviour. There were five cabinet minis-

ters and three backbenchers on that flight. It's not just the Premier. It's the whole caucus. It's the whole cabinet. To the Finance minister: why is the sense of entitlement of this government and this PC caucus so strong that they believe that Albertans should pick up . . .

The Speaker: Time has elapsed. We need an answer. The Minister of Finance, please.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, today, as you most aptly pointed out, is the 13th anniversary of my entering this Chamber. I'm very proud of that service. I'm very proud of the fact that I have done and will continue to do service for the people, a passion for service, not a passion for politics, not a passion for ideology. We have a passion to serve Albertans. The things that are being brought up here today are trying to take Albertans' minds away from the very positive things that this government has done like a hospital in Grande Prairie, like a hospital in Edson, like building Alberta for the future. That's what Albertans want us to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we have a point of order that was raised sometime between 2:06 and 2:07 by the Government House Leader – I think it was during the time that the Liberal opposition leader was speaking – and we have a second point of order that was raised by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills at approximately 2:10 p.m. during the question being asked by the member from the New Democrat opposition, but it may go back to something just before that.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: While I'm on my feet, could I just take a moment to please remind all of you of a convention that I've reminded you of several times before, and I've just spotted it now. It's in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition. It starts on page 502, and then it goes on to page 504. It says, "In summary, when recognized in Question Period, a Member should [not ask questions that] concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses." There's a reason why we don't allow questions like that in parliament – whether it's expenses or fundraising, it's all to do with party matters – and it's because it tends to create disorder. If you want to pursue those kinds of questions, write them or create them in terms of government policy. There's a clever way that you could all do that. Just be careful. I didn't rule anybody out of order. I let them all go. I'm just giving you a warning, okay?

Let us move on, then. No more preambles now, please, to supplementaries, and let's see how that's demonstrated with Calgary-Shaw.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims (continued)

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of flood-affected residents all over Alberta have yet to receive a single dollar in assistance from the DRP to address the devastation they suffered to their homes and businesses. For the last nine months it would appear the government has been held hostage by LandLink, the company they hired to manage the millions of taxpayer dollars used for disaster relief. Now, today the minister has suggested that all cases will be closed, all 10,500, by the end of March. How is the minister planning on dealing with appeals?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, allow me to clarify my comments earlier because the hon. member and his hon. leader have actually misled the House in terms of what I actually said. What I said was . . . [interjections] I perhaps have misstated my intention, and I apologize. I didn't mean to allege misleading. However, let me say that what I have said is that we expect 90 per cent of all the residential files to be resolved by or close to the end of March. Now, there are other files. There are files related to agricultural operations. There are files related to businesses. Those are going to take time to resolve as well.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alan and Joyce Hird of High River recently learned that the disaster relief program is prepared to assist them with only \$10,000, which is \$25,000 less than what they needed to cover the cost to remediate and repair their basement. Given that there are countless other cases where LandLink is failing Albertans, how is your ministry, Minister, going to resolve these failures in the next two and a half weeks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a helpful question. Actually, what's going to happen is that everybody who receives a settlement as of the last few weeks will also receive with that a letter which spells out exactly why they received the settlement.

There is an appeal process, and that's spelled out in the letter as well. I would encourage Albertans who feel that they have not been dealt with in an appropriate manner to pursue that appeal process and deal with that and also provide the evidence that they are worthy of greater support than what they will have received if they're not . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Endorsing and allowing a company that was never going to be able to capably manage a DRP program of this size, scale, and scope was a massive oversight. Minister, will you commit right here and right now not only to ensure that everyone who feels that they were wronged by LandLink will have a review process in place but also enlighten the House as to what we're doing moving forward from this point?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is, actually, a helpful take on the circumstance. Clearly, this was a model that was developed probably 20 years ago with the independent company providing this service. It's clearly not up to the needs of a disaster of this size. I have taken steps to ensure that the way in which a disaster recovery program is addressed in the future is much different. I welcome input from members on all sides of this House with respect to changes that might be taken into account in that DRP of the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie rose on a point of order at approximately 2:15 p.m. I believe it was with regard to the word "misled." I think we heard the minister apologize, but we'll see where that might or might not go later.

Let's move on to Calgary-Currie, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Public Transit Funding

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given yesterday's funding announcement by the government for public transit in Edmonton, my constituents are curious as to what that means for the city of Calgary. Calgarians need to know that our provincial government is not playing favourites between Alberta's two largest cities. My question is to the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. Will Calgary be offered the same provincial public transit funding deal that was announced for Edmonton yesterday?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a good day for Edmonton's LRT yesterday and for Edmontonians, some government business. We're pleased in the throne speech and in the budget to extend our commitment to GreenTRIP as well as to talk about our commitments with the building Canada fund. The city of Edmonton had an allocation under GreenTRIP which was applied towards the LRT. The city of Calgary has an allocation under GreenTRIP. All municipalities in the province are eligible for the second round. We look forward to working with all of our municipalities on their number one priorities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Cusanelli: To the same minister: are these sorts of provincial public transit funding deals an anomaly, or is this a new way of doing business?

Mr. Horner: Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We're looking for ways to do business with our municipalities that work for them and work for us and work for taxpayers. Yesterday's announcement was exactly one of those things. We look forward to doing that not only with the city of Calgary but with all of the municipalities in the province, the rural MDs, the urban and rural municipalities that are looking to do things that will help move citizens to and from their place of work using GreenTRIP funding, using building Canada funding. That's what building Alberta is all about.

Ms Cusanelli: We'd like to see other efforts currently being undertaken by the government that are going to provide long-term, stable public transit funding. Or is this just a one-off?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2014 saw a commitment of some \$2 billion to municipalities. In fact, one of the augmentations was another \$20 million through the Alberta community partnership, which is a fund for regional collaboration, which is what we all want to see. We want to see municipalities work together. We want to see that they build their communities together with their neighbours and that they serve the interests of their constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Premier's Former Staff Member's Employment

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ryan Barberio is the Premier's former executive assistant. After working in her office of Justice minister, he worked on her PC leadership campaign and then followed her into the Premier's office. He is now listed on the

Alberta sunshine list as a senior manager in International and Intergovernmental Relations with a total compensation package of over \$160,000 per year. Can the associate IIR minister assure Albertans that Mr. Barberio was awarded the senior position through an open job competition?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many people who work for this government who have talent and are good public servants. The purpose of the sunshine list isn't to open every one of our public servants to attack and question as to whether or not they went through an appropriate hiring process. [interjections] We go through appropriate hiring processes, we find and select good talent, we utilize people in appropriate places, and we move them to where they can do the most good for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not the employee's fault. I'm actually asking the minister.

Mr. Speaker, given the very senior nature of Mr. Barberio's position and given the magnitude of the files and issues IIR is currently dealing with, it's of utmost importance that we hire the most talented, experienced, and qualified individuals that we can for these jobs. Again to the associate minister of IIR: was Mr. Barberio hired to this senior managerial position through an open and fair job competition with other qualified applicants? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Premier, before you speak.

Calgary-Buffalo, could I get you to just tone it down a bit. You might be on the list. I'll recognize you later but not now, please.

The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to hiring people who have talent, using those talents well, using those people in the most appropriate places. Again, the purpose of a sunshine list is not to expose each individual member of the public service to this type of critique. The assurance that this government can give is that when we hire people to do a job, we hire the best people we can find to do those jobs.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not about the individual. It's about the protocol. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, given that Mr. Barberio wouldn't be the Premier's first former office staffer to land on his feet with a senior high-paying government job, can the associate IIR minister immediately put to rest the notion that this \$160,000 per year job was a post created specifically for Mr. Barberio after he left the Premier's office? [interjections] Table the job posting, please, Minister.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Before you respond, could I get Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Finance and whoever else is on the front bench giving the bait or taking the bait to please stop. You can hardly hear the question being asked, but we can sure hear your conversation. Please, let's stop this across-the-bow stuff. Look up

here if you have to, look somewhere else, find something to read, but don't take the bait, and whoever is giving it, don't give it.

Let's carry on. Who's answering? Deputy Premier, please.

Premier's Former Staff Member's Employment (continued)

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would much prefer to look at you when I answer the questions, and I will take your advice on that because it's very important that in this House we do focus on the important issues.

I can say to this hon. member and to all hon. members of the House that this government takes very, very seriously how we deploy personnel, whom we deploy in offices across the country and across the world on behalf of Albertans. Opening up new markets requires talent. We use that talent well, and we get the best talent we can.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Highway 19 Twinning

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The twinning of highway 19 between Nisku and the town of Devon has been an ongoing issue in my constituency for far too long. While my constituents wait for a definite decision on this project, the industrial traffic continues to increase, and the safety of my constituents continues to be a major concern. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Can the minister provide an update on his ministry's plans to twin highway 19?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. He is always advocating hard for his constituency. Highway 19 is an important route here in the capital region and for the province as a whole. We are committed to ensuring the safety of motorists and improving accessibility to this industrial hub. The twinning project is currently in the design stages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how is the minister working with stakeholders such as the Edmonton International Airport authority and affected residents to develop this finalized plan?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my department is working very closely with all interested stakeholders in finalizing this twinning design. In addition, Alberta Transportation and EIA have held a number of public open houses to keep residents apprised of the developments. We have also had direct contact with potentially affected landowners in the region.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. The minister mentioned some public open houses. Could he possibly elaborate on when and whether we'll see some more, if there'll be any more any time soon to update the public on this very, very important issue?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, it's too early to begin planning another public open house at this stage. We are committed to keeping local residents informed of new developments, and we will look at maybe organizing another public open house when we have more information to share.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre in place of Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Legal Services for Low-income Albertans

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Access to justice is a critical component of our Constitution and of Canadian culture, but in Alberta the government's funding for access to justice for low-income people has been steadily decreasing. As a result, our courts are faced to deal with an increasing number of unrepresented people because they simply can't afford a lawyer. My question to the Minister of Justice is: what was the reasoning for setting the cut-off level for legal aid so that people on assured income for the severely handicapped or even someone working full-time minimum wage would not qualify?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The cut-off for legal aid, as the member mentions, is actually set solely and completely by Legal Aid itself. It is an autonomous society. I do want to mention to this member that the province is proud to fund 83 per cent of the legal aid costs. The federal government only picks up about \$10 million. I raised this issue in Whitehorse last year at our federal-provincial-territorial justice ministers' meeting, and we will continue to raise this issue.

Ms Blakeman: Nonetheless, the government does fund for this. You can't put it off on the feds.

Could the minister explain why a 19 per cent cut was made to the very services that provide civil mediation and law libraries, which is what these unrepresented people are supposed to use and where our AISH recipients and minimum-wage earners are supposed to be getting help. Why would you cut that?

Mr. Denis: The member is quite correct. We did privatize law library resources last year. We found that it was not a good use of taxpayers' dollars to continue funding that in the current model. I also would like to let this member know that we are very proud that as part of our 2012 operations, at the end of the year we had a \$7 million surplus, and we gave it all to Legal Aid.

Ms Blakeman: Well, that's an encouraging sign. Maybe I can keep them doing it.

Back to the same minister: given that denying legal aid to people is making them go to court without representation and that's clogging up the courts and given that legal aid isn't even free – sometimes it has to be paid back and sometimes even up front – why is it that the minister is so keen to make it hard for low-income and sick Albertans to get good legal advice?

Mr. Denis: Again, as I mentioned to this member, Mr. Speaker, we fund 83 per cent of the costs of legal aid. The federal government over the last 10 years, under two different administrations, has been gradually decreasing their share of this amount. The previous Minister of Justice and I have had this discussion, and we will continue to encourage the federal government to

match where we are at with respect to the strong commitment to legal aid and access to justice that this government has.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, curriculum sets out the basic learning objectives for children in our province. In the past the curriculum for Alberta's students has been designed by teachers, parents, school boards, and experts. This time oil and gas companies have been awarded the title of stakeholders and key education partners, allowing them to shape what is taught in our schools. Alberta's NDP are in favour of children learning about Alberta and its natural resources, but allowing corporations to decide what kids learn in grade school is dead wrong. To the Minister of Education: why do you insist on opening the classroom door to corporate propaganda?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our curriculum is constantly upgraded in this province. The member has that right. What's different about this process is that we actually want to take it out to the community and let everyone who has a stake in education be a part of that dialogue. It's still going to be led by teachers. It's still going to be led by educators and those school boards. But we do want to hear from parents, we do want to hear from students, and we do want the First Nations and the Métis to have some input in this as well. We want to hear from the economy. We want to hear from the employers. Some of those are oil and gas companies. There's nothing wrong with oil and gas companies. They drive this province. I see that member over there doesn't mind cashing their cheques either.

Mr. Bilous: Deciding what they learn in kindergarten.

Mr. Speaker, given that oil and gas companies are partners across the board in every curriculum project, all four, from kindergarten all the way up to grade 12, while teachers are partners in only one, to the minister: will you tell Albertans why the oil and gas sector gets four times the influence of teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that's not true. Teachers are involved in every one of these, and teachers are leading these. As a matter of fact, I've got educators and teachers and former teachers in my department that have thought up this process, and the ATA has been at the table for two years as part of developing this process, and so have Alberta school boards. Unfortunately, this hon. member left that little piece of it out.

There's no reason that we shouldn't hear from the economy and that we shouldn't hear from entrepreneurs if we want to develop entrepreneurs. That doesn't mean they're building the curriculum; that means they get some input, and our kids will have a more relevant education at the end of the day. These companies also have a really good perspective on how maybe we can interest kids in science and technology and engineering, some of the key areas that we need skilled people for.

2:30

Mr. Bilous: Read your own document, Minister. Teachers are not listed.

Mr. Speaker, given that this minister believes that he knows best – better than teachers, better than Albertans – and given the minister can't see the difference between teaching students about the oil and gas sector versus allowing the oil and gas sector to decide what students learn in our schools, to the minister: this is offensive to Albertans. What are you going to do to fix it?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the member completely misses the point. Once again, teachers are leading this. This isn't about oil and gas. This is about being relevant. It's about the economy. It's about entrepreneurialism. It's about making sure that our kids have the skills coming out of it to be employable. There's nothing wrong with working, I mean, or working for oil and gas. We can't all work for Greenpeace.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to listen to these folks, and it's important for them to bring ideas to the table, like I said, that might help our kids get interested in the sciences and get interested in engineering and technology. We're not going to apologize for trying to listen to the business community when we're trying . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-East.

School Construction

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the House of two stories that we often tell our children. The first is about the boy who cried wolf. Remember that this boy ran around everywhere saying something was happening when it actually wasn't. It seems the government does the same thing with building Alberta. The second story is of Pinocchio. This young boy would mislead everyone he spoke to, and eventually his nose began to grow.

Mr. Denis: Point of order.

Mrs. Towle: To the Minister of Infrastructure. The other day this House was told that even though the government has announced 50 schools, the government has no idea how much the schools will cost, how they'll be built, or how they'll be paid for. Which story can Albertans believe about this government, the boy who cried wolf or Pinocchio?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question reminds me of the story of the opposition, that always says: you should put the infrastructure that you're going to build on your website. They haven't got a single school listed on their website. We have several under construction now. We'll be building 50 new ones and 70 rehabilitated schools by 2016. We're actually building Alberta. We're putting in place the things that Albertans have asked us for, and we listened. The building Alberta plan under this Premier will provide the infrastructure that Albertans actually want.

Mrs. Towle: It looks like we're going with Pinocchio.

Given that the minister has announced the K to 8 school in Sylvan Lake and it takes three years to build a school and given that this community will actually have no idea when this government will keep its promise to Albertans, does this government honestly believe that it's responsible for them to announce schools they cannot build and cry wolf to communities who desperately need these schools?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I think what's important is what we do in this government. We listen to Albertans, we find out what they want in all communities, including Sylvan Lake, and that's what we're doing. We are working hard to get those schools delivered by 2016. The budget showed that what we have is a plan to get started during 2014-2015. As the contracts are done, more exact numbers will be in. Those folks would have us go to the contractors and say, "We've got this much money. How much do

you want?" So they'd take it all. We are actually trying to get Albertans a good deal. They can't seem to get that through their heads.

Mrs. Towle: Doo-doo: finally some language I can agree with the minister on.

Given that a full year after announcing a new school in Blackfolds, there are still no shovels in the ground, and given that the K to 8 school in Sylvan Lake was just announced, Minister, can you give a date when Sylvan Lake can expect more than a shovel in the ground, or will you be making this promise as part of your election campaign for Premier? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, we're anxious for your answer.

Mr. McIver: You know what? Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member may be jealous of the Member for Airdrie, whom we've seen a picture of posing with a shovel in the ground for the schools there, and I recognize that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake wants to be there, too. You know why? Because she's excited also about the building Alberta plan. We're all excited about it. She should just watch and see us put it in place because under this Premier and this government we're going to make it happen.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, your point of order was noted at approximately 2:33 p.m. during the first question from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Let us move on. Calgary-East, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. During a recent meeting with the Council of Alberta University Students they expressed concerns regarding costs to the postsecondary students. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-East actually has the floor.

Mr. Amery: Thank you. Many students would like to attend postsecondary schools, Mr. Speaker, but the cost is increasingly becoming a burden. Alberta currently has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the country, a rate of 17 per cent. My question is to the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. What is the minister doing to ensure that all qualified and interested students have an equal opportunity to attend an Alberta postsecondary institution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring access to education is one of the pillars of Campus Alberta. We want to make sure that every Albertan has an opportunity to advance their education, and we want to ensure that cost is not a barrier to any student's getting an education. It's one of the reasons we've created 2,000 new student spaces in the 2014 budget. We're very proud of the education system we have. Our trades system, for example, educates 22 per cent of the trades graduates in this country every year. We have one of the most generous scholarship and financial support programs in the entire country. In this year's budget: \$490 million for student loans, \$74 million for scholarships, \$69 million in grants.

The Speaker: Thank you. The time has elapsed.

Let us hear the first supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the minister doing to regulate noninstructional fees, which are becoming a burden on the students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Noninstructional fees are fees that have been charged by some of the postsecondaries across the province in the last few years. What we've undertaken with students and with the postsecondary institutions is to do a complete review of the funding model and a review of the tuition and other fees charged. That will be pursued this year. Students will have a voice at the table in those reviews, and we will come out with a funding model which works to ensure that Albertans have access to education and a tuition and fees policy which works to ensure, with our student loans and finance process, that finances are not a barrier to education.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister and his department consider adopting an open textbook policy to allow students to use textbooks through an open-source framework similar to what's being done in B.C.?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited about digital access to online resources. When I held this portfolio before, we started, you might recall, the Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library. Adding more resources to that library and adding more access for Albertans to that library are extremely important objectives.

Open textbooks is a great concept. It's been pioneered in other jurisdictions. We're looking to what B.C. is doing. We're working very hard on that. I'd ask the hon. member and others in this House to keep their ears open very soon for progress in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Travel Alberta Executive Expenses

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] We all remember David Dingwall and his famous quote: I'm entitled to my entitlements. We get the feeling that it could be the next election theme for the PC Party and this minister of the tourism. Presumably, before every disclosure period the minister would review disclosures of their senior bureaucrats. So why did the minister accept a \$99 claim, \$150 tuxedo rental, amongst other dubious claims? Or did he just not do his job?

Dr. Starke: Nice tux.

Mr. Speaker, as tourism minister – not “minister of the tourism” but Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation – I'm very proud of our tourism industry in this province. I'm proud to be able to promote this province around the world, nationally, and around our province. Travel Alberta has an integral part to play in that, but that being said, they have to play by the rules. That's why I've instructed a full review of Travel Alberta's expenses. That review will be undertaken, and those results will be in my hands very quickly.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's 130 bucks. I paid for it myself. [interjections]

Given that my constituency of Drumheller-Stettler receives large numbers of tourists every year and that we therefore expect nothing but the best from Travel Alberta, is it any wonder that we are upset that the PC government allows \$1,800 dinners with \$300 alcohol tabs for internal strategy meetings? Or is that just the way this PC government does business?

2:40

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will have to confess that I had a difficult time hearing most of that question. Perhaps the tux is a little tight, and he is not able to project well today.

But I will say, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, that Travel Alberta will be conducting a full, thorough, independent, third-party review of all expenses. I expect that when the results of that come to light, we will determine whether there, in fact, are any inappropriate expenses, and those expenses will be fully reconciled.

Mr. Strankman: A \$99 steak kind of makes it fit a little tight. [interjections]

Does the minister think it is economical for Travel Alberta to have a \$1,000 dinner at a Canmore resort, including the driver, the \$99 steak, for a board meeting, or is that just another part of the PC government's entitlements?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite really proves that if you're going to try to be impo'tant, you dress impo'tant. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to promote Alberta as a tourism destination.

The Speaker: You know, it's Wednesday, not Thursday, so could we please restore some civility and decorum here and listen to the final answer?

You have a couple of seconds left, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're going to conduct a full, independent review. I'm very proud of the work that Travel Alberta does. It's an award-winning organization, and I think everybody should know that Travel Alberta promotes Alberta as a world-class tourism destination, and that's what it will always be.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe I heard the bell amongst all the din, and that means that the time for question period has expired.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

MacEwan University

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to call attention to the continued success of one of our postsecondary institutions located just down the street from the Legislature. MacEwan University is named after a great Albertan, former Lieutenant Governor Grant MacEwan. Founded in 1971, MacEwan has gone from a local community college to an impressive university with more than 13,000 students.

Mr. Speaker, our government places a high value on a postsecondary education, and today this government announced

that it's helping MacEwan University to take the next step in its continued growth. Through the building Alberta plan we will invest \$30 million over the next three years to help build the centre for arts and culture, a new academic building that is the missing link in the university's dream for a single, sustainable downtown campus. Construction will begin this summer. The five-storey academic and performing arts centre opens in the fall of 2017.

Mr. Speaker, this project puts students first by helping MacEwan University consolidate its operation at one downtown campus. All students will have improved access to recreation facilities, MacEwan sports teams, libraries, counsellors, faculty, and improved amenities. In the future MacEwan University expects more than 17,000 students, and this single, sustainable campus will help make this a reality.

After yesterday's exciting LRT announcement I am very thrilled that students from my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods will take the LRT to go to this amazing addition to MacEwan University.

MacEwan University has an important role in Campus Alberta, and our government is acting to ensure that this institution can continue to grow and serve Albertans today and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Medicine Hat.

Education System

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, I'm about to end my 23-year experience with public education in Alberta. No, it's not that I haven't been able to master my basic math skills. This June my third child will graduate grade 12.

Education matters, and the education system that is available for all Albertans is among the best in the world. Educators from many countries come here to learn from and copy the practices outlined in Inspiring Education. Alberta high school graduates are Rhodes Scholars. They are inventors. They are entrepreneurs. They are creative thinkers. They are the ones providing services, goods, and innovation so that this province can continue to grow and prosper.

Mr. Speaker, the content, delivery, and format of education is constantly evolving. The work being done with curriculum redesign will improve content to ensure that superior numeracy and literacy become the central focus of classroom activity in new and more intuitive ways.

At the age of 25 one of my children had a bachelor of science and a master's in public policy, another at 22 had obtained a mechanical engineering degree, and the youngest has received early acceptance to the two universities of his choice. All three children were educated in the public system here in Alberta. It is a credit that they and their classmates and their friends are equipped for success to move forward.

Education in Alberta is delivered by passionate, caring teachers and principals as well as by supportive parents and community partners. It is an evolving service that we can be proud of, but evolution requires change. I don't know about you guys; I never did master the slide rule, and I'm glad I didn't have to help my kids learn how to use that one.

We can't let changing times outpace us, and this is why re-design is both necessary and healthy. We will continue to ensure that we hold ourselves to a high standard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government is quick to brag about making promises, but all too often we see them break them and then tell us they never made them in the first place.

Last year the Premier promised to increase postsecondary funding. Instead, she cut funding without warning and without remorse. We should always be working to find efficiencies, but you don't find a better system by placing students and institutions in a chokehold.

The government is now touting an increase in funding for more spaces for Alberta students in classrooms in response to the needs of the economy and our communities. I've heard from students that this is a good step forward. However, I would ask this PC government to bring in sustainable and predictable funding for students and institutions and eliminate politics when it comes to funding postsecondary education in our province.

One thing I'm sure the minister has learned by now – and if he hasn't, he will soon – is that when Alberta students are frustrated with the system, they don't torch cars, destroy stores, and shut down cities like we see elsewhere. They get together, have a discussion about ideas and solutions, and then provide these recommendations to the government. We saw this with the Ignite Report, which brought together students from nearly every postsecondary institution in the province. Students share that they are concerned about the cost and quality of education they are receiving, ensuring increased access for students to the institutions, and how unstable and unpredictable funding is hurting the foundations of advanced education.

As the minister is surely aware, mandatory noninstructional fees are also a huge concern for students, and they are an increased cost to their education. Students have shared with me that they have significant concerns with how these fees are determined and collected. The minister could address these concerns and consult with students and institutions to find a solution that works.

It's time for a sustainable and predictable funding model for Alberta's postsecondary students and institutions. We owe all Albertans at least that much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: I have notification here of notices of motions. Hon. Member for Highlands-Norwood, you gave notice yesterday.

Mr. Mason: Yes, I did, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We have one from Calgary-Shaw as well.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) I would like to raise a question of privilege based on a response yesterday by the Minister of Health.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you have a report you wish to table?

Mr. Mason: Yes, in fact, I do. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail to the Premier sent by Robert

Kroetsch, a registered nurse in the emergency department of the Grey Nuns hospital. In his e-mail he expresses his frustration with the Premier as well as that of many of his co-workers, asking, "Why is it when times get tough you want to cut my pension, cut my benefits and bully my right to fair and unobstructed bargaining?"

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in a moment. Let's go on to Cardston-Taber-Warner first.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today and the requisite number of copies. The first is from an associate of mine from Raymond, Alberta, in my riding. He has written to me and expressed his concern to my assistant that he helped build classrooms during the flood situation in High River and that he and many other workers have not been paid. His attempts to get paid have been unsuccessful, unfortunately. He points out that "the government contracted the job to Wind River Developments, but it was sold to OZO who went bankrupt shortly thereafter." He feels "this all comes back to the government because they should be sure to hire companies that are credible." I have that to table.

Also, a hard-working farmer in my riding, Brian Hildebrand, shares some rambling thoughts, as he called them, indicating that seeing all of the things that he's been seeing on Facebook and social media and in the newspapers about the concerns with Premier, he just thought that he ought to point out the failings of this government, of which he feels the Premier's own behaviour is only "the tip of the iceberg." That's the second tabling that I have.

The third one is from Dale Stuart, who was watching the proceedings here in this Assembly. He's concerned about why power companies are allowed to gouge their customers and the inability of the opposition to get straight answers about it. That's the third tabling.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have two tablings today. For the first I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A, are clear evidence the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is affordable and accessible to all.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder, and it's in regard to the *Edmonton Journal* article that he referenced in his member's statement talking about pension plans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? None? Thank you.

We can now proceed to points of privilege and points of order. We have two points of privilege to hear today. Let's start with the first one from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who served notice of this yesterday.

Privilege Intimidation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in the House yesterday, I'm rising on a point of privilege in response

to an answer given yesterday in question period by the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy. Now, I am given to understand by the Deputy Government House Leader that there may be a clarification coming from the associate minister with respect to this matter. If that is still the case, then I would be prepared to significantly abbreviate my point of privilege, but I do feel it's important to get the main points on the record, in any event. If that is still the understanding from the government side, then I will do so and with your permission.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's your point of privilege. Proceed as you wish. I'm prepared to hear it. If you want to get something on the record, now is your opportunity. I'm not aware of any deals or any discussions between caucuses.

Mr. Mason: No. It's not a deal, Mr. Speaker. A remedy has been suggested, so I'm going to shorten it.

I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) to address comments made yesterday in the Assembly by the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy. In *Alberta Hansard*, page 168, she said that "for us to offer opinions at this point in time actually compromises consumers, and I would remind this member, including all members of the opposition, that they can be called before the regulator to clarify their comments." Mr. Speaker, the concern is that that could be interpreted as a threat and was certainly intended to inhibit questions on this matter from the opposition. As such, I think it's a serious breach of the rights of the members of the Assembly.

Beauchesne's section 75 says, "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member." *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 89, also states that freedom of speech is the first right of members. "By far, the most important right accorded to Members of the House is the exercise of freedom of speech in parliamentary proceedings." Further, the comments yesterday amount to a suggestion that a member or all members of the opposition should restrict their statements and questions in the House.

Beauchesne's section 69 confirms that it is not the inflammatory or offensive nature of comments that gives rise to a breach of privilege but, rather, whether they impinge on the ability of members to do their jobs properly. It is, I think, worthy of note.

The other citation I'd like to make is from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which states on page 93 that immunity from prosecution or civil liability for comments made is essential because it allows members "to make statements or allegations about outside bodies or persons, which that they may hesitate to make without the [question] of privilege." It goes on to say that "the freedom to make allegations which the Member genuinely believes at the time to be true, or at least worthy of investigation, is fundamental."

More to the point, it is very important to remember that *Beauchesne's* says at 89 that "no Member may be compelled to appear in court as a witness." So the associate minister in making the suggestion that we could be called before the regulator to explain our comments was perhaps not aware of the fact that we are protected by our privilege from having to testify before any regulatory body or any court.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on the point of making threats to members, *Beauchesne's* 93 says, "It is generally accepted that any threat, or attempt to influence the vote of, or actions of a Member, is a breach of privilege." The privilege to be free of obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation also flows from the same fundamental right to freedom of speech. A member cannot be impeded from doing the job of representing their constituents.

The ability of a member to speak freely is particularly important for opposition members, who have an additional duty above and beyond the duty to speak on behalf of their constituents. I am referring to the opposition's function of holding the government to account. This function requires that members have the ability to question the government about its business on behalf of Albertans. Question period is, therefore, one of the most important parts of parliamentary procedure. We think that the statements yesterday were threats to those important principles.

Erskine May uses a similar case as an example of a breach of privilege at page 262, where a member in the British House of Commons was threatened "with the possibility of a trial at some future time for a question [they] asked in the House."

There was a similar case in 1993, in *Alberta Hansard* at page 907, where the Speaker found no breach of privilege only because the member in question was challenged to repeat the questions in another form to see what would happen. Anyway, I don't think that's that important.

3:00

In my view, Mr. Speaker, the minister's comments do indicate an attempt to threaten, intimidate, or suggest to opposition members that they may not ask questions about a certain matter under pain of being called before a regulatory hearing to explain their actions. It represents, in my view, a real attempt to limit the ability of opposition members to do their job in this place. As a result, unless there is some action on the part of the associate minister, then I would ask that you find a *prima facie* case of contempt of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I'm going to recognize the hon. associate minister responsible for electricity and renewable energy at this point. Maybe we can save some time. I'm just anticipating, based on your words, hon. leader of the ND opposition, what might occur. I don't know. But let's hear from her now.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have read and reread the *Hansard* records from yesterday and my response in particular to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It was in response to allegations about an issue before the Alberta Utilities Commission, and I won't reread the comments. They've already been presented here. When I made the comments, I was thinking about the electricity regulator legislation, in particular the Alberta utilities act in section 19, which states that "the Commission may, when in its opinion the attendance of any person before the Commission is desirable, serve on the witness a notice requiring the witness's attendance before the Commission."

Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to act in any way that is not respectful of this Legislature or of fellow members. It was my intention to indicate that comments by members may trigger the AUC to call that member to a hearing in question. But, of course, you are correct that, based on legal jurisprudence, the AUC may well not be able to compel an MLA to a hearing.

I apologize for any offence. It was not intended, and I withdraw my comments to this member.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, that automatically concludes the issue. A withdrawal and apology ends the matter.

We will now go on to the second point of privilege, from Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Please have a seat, hon. member. We're going to the second point of privilege because that first one . . .

Mr. Anglin: Well, there's a problem with . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, that concludes that matter. If you have something else to ask, it might be in order, but that concludes that matter. If you have anything else that you want to pursue, we have question period, and we have debate. We have a number of other avenues. You can send me a nice letter if you like.

Let's go on to Calgary-Shaw now and have the second point of privilege raised. Calgary-Shaw, please.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, can I please seek clarification?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I've indicated already that that concludes the matter, and that's the only clarification that is required. So we will conclude that matter and move on now.

A third time I'm calling for the second point of privilege, or are you withdrawing it, Calgary-Shaw?

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising in accordance with Standing Order 15(2) to raise a point of privilege; namely, that yesterday, March 11, 2014, the Minister of Health interfered with the ability of members of this House to fulfill their duties when he stated that a trip to Grande Prairie on October 25, 2012, was for the purpose of making an announcement related to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital.

I would like to refer you to the *Hansard* from yesterday in question period, where the minister, in answering a question posed by the Leader of the Official Opposition, said:

Well, Mr. Speaker, I was one of the cabinet ministers that was present with the Premier in Grande Prairie at that time. We made an announcement, as the hon. members should know, with respect to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital. The announcement specifically talked about the progress on the construction of the hospital, an update on the total cost for that facility. This is one example of the important government business that we do using the aircraft that are funded by the taxpayers of this province.

Circumstances indicate that several government ministers did use a government plane to travel to Grande Prairie, and there was a press release the same day. But the government ministers did not take part in the announcement. Therefore, this was not only an example of the misuse of taxpayer resources, but the Minister of Health intentionally misled the House by referring to the hospital announcement, knowing that neither he nor the other ministers present attended any such announcement. Because of this, I believe that the minister has interfered in the ability of members to fulfill their duties.

First, I would like to mention that notice of this point of privilege was raised at the earliest opportunity since the response of the minister was made in the House yesterday. Notice of the point was delivered to the Speaker's office this morning according to the rules laid out in Standing Order 15(2).

To establish there has been an intentional and grave point of privilege, Mr. Speaker, there is a test required. Looking at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 86, it explains there are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made. First, the statement must in fact have been misleading; secondly, it must be established that the member

making the statement knew at the time that the statement the member was making was incorrect; and third, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.

Now, here are the facts as we understand them, Mr. Speaker. We have not found a government media advisory for October 25, 2012, related to this announcement. A reporter who is on the distribution list to receive media advisories and who was in Grande Prairie at the time has stated that he did not receive a media advisory that day. Neither the Premier nor the Minister of Health was listed on the Order Paper as a ministerial absence. This means they had no prior intention of leaving Edmonton until after question period, around 3 p.m., that day. This is not consistent with a cancelled government hospital announcement.

The government plane left Edmonton at 3:40 p.m. on October 25. The news release related to the Grande Prairie hospital expansion was sent out at 4:02 p.m., while the plane was in the air. The plane carrying the Premier and the Minister of Health landed at 4:32 p.m. The PC Party scheduled a press conference for 5:20 p.m. later that day. A party media availability does not constitute government business. The formal program followed at 7 p.m.

The Minister of Health, reading from a piece of paper that looked prepared as if in anticipation of this very question, stated in the House yesterday, March 11, 2014, that an announcement in Grande Prairie was “important government business” and required the use of the government plane. Well, a report emerged from the Canadian Press reporter later yesterday that the government acknowledged the event did not take place but was cancelled because of the St. Paul tragedy earlier in the day. Now, this claim does not hold up in the fact that no media notices were sent out.

It seems clear, Mr. Speaker, that this is a prima facie case of privilege. First, we must establish whether or not the statement was misleading. In this case, the circumstances indicate there was no government announcement even planned for the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital. The minister’s statement that the announcement was an example of government business is misleading because no such announcement actually took place, nor is there evidence that one was ever scheduled. A press release does not constitute a press conference, and a media release does not constitute a government announcement.

Second, the minister had to have known that the statement he was making was misleading. It’s clear that the minister knew that he was making a misleading statement. In his answer yesterday, recorded in *Hansard*, the minister answered the initial question asked by the Leader of the Official Opposition without hesitation and reading out of his binder. Obviously, the minister had already been briefed on the events of October 25, 2012, but he himself should know that he would have not been at any such announcement. It isn’t conceivable that he recalled the events of this day one and a half years ago without being reminded recently of the chronology. So given that the minister had been briefed on the events of October 25, 2012, and had answered the question with no hesitation, he knew that the statement he was making was misleading. He was trying to pass off a PC Party press conference as government business.

Third, the member must have intended to mislead the House. Knowing that the announcement made that evening was part of a party event and knowing that the government plane was used to fly him and the Premier to this event and other ministers home to Calgary and Edmonton from the event, the minister answered the question in a way that was meant to imply that his use of the plane was strictly for government business and that the timing of the flight just fortunately aligned with a planned party fundraiser.

3:10

We understand that exactness in every answer is not a requirement in this House, and for that reason a member can speak and later correct his or her statement if it later turns out to be false. But this case is different, Mr. Speaker, and shows a clear intent to mislead the members of the Assembly and subsequently to obstruct other members as they try to clearly understand the actions of this government. Further, the minister again today defended such decisions, such language, and I would argue that perhaps he should reconsider that as well.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to find this minister in breach of privilege in this case.

Thank you.

The Speaker: No one else?

Let’s go, then, to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member had politely stated what exactly the test is out of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – and I thank him for that – and the government also takes no issue with respect to the time which he’d taken here. It was quick. But as far as the test, with no disrespect to the Member for Calgary-Shaw, he’s failed in all three instances.

Mr. Speaker, on the morning of October 25, 2012, the government got word that a serious accident had happened in a school in St. Paul. The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti was scheduled to be in Grande Prairie in the mid-afternoon to make the official announcement of the new Grande Prairie hospital with the Minister of Health. This event was part of the five big hospital announcements that had been planned for weeks. After speaking to school board officials in St. Paul, it was determined that the Minister of Education and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti would go to the school. In fact, they even brought the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills on the government plane to St. Paul that day since the tragic accident happened in his constituency, and that member later praised both ministers publicly for their support during that time, and we thank him for the same.

As a result of these events, plans had to change. The minister had to leave Edmonton with the Premier and with the Minister of Health around 1:30, but the flight was pushed back so that they could wait for the Minister of Education and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to return to Edmonton. Because the incident was at the school, Mr. Speaker, the event up north had to be pushed back and realigned, and thus the announcement happened very close to the time frame of the partisan dinner that was mentioned earlier. The Minister of Finance mentioned earlier as well that there, in fact, was a party plane that went up for people there that did not have any party business.

So my first statement to you, Mr. Speaker, is that this fails the test. In fact, it was not a misleading statement. Second, on top of that, there has been no evidence tendered to indicate that the Minister of Health had some sort of positive intention, that he knew it was false, or, again, evidence that the Minister of Health planned to mislead.

I do wish to mention to you that the member’s statement that there was no media release is, unfortunately, incorrect, Mr. Speaker. I’m holding in my hand a media release, which I can table for you tomorrow, from October 25, 2012, indicating – this is the title – New Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Means Improved Access to Emergency Services, Surgery and Cancer Care. The next day there was a story about this by Keith Gerein of the *Edmonton Journal*, Friday, October 26, and there was also

another story from the *Daily Herald-Tribune*, by a gentleman named Graeme Bruce, saying: New Hospital Gets Name Change, Budget Increase. To me, this is very, very rank-and-file government business, and as we all know, this business that we're involved in, opposition or government, can change on a dime. It's very difficult to actually go and plan on a day-to-day basis.

I wanted also to mention a couple of items in *Beauchesne's* that I have found. First off, I refer you, sir, to *Beauchesne's* 117(2), which indicates that "the Speaker's function in ruling on a claim of breach of privilege is limited to deciding the formal question . . ." – and I go ahead – "and does not extend to deciding the question of substance." So that limit is what the precedent had to say.

But, more interestingly, Mr. Speaker, I refer you also to *Beauchesne's* 31(1), which deals with points of privilege. It states, "A dispute . . . between two Members, as to allegations of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege." So to state that there is a point of privilege here is simply a misconception, and I hope that I can get this member over to my way of thinking.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Strathcona, you indicated a request to speak.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. The authorities have been reviewed very clearly. The question becomes, essentially: was the statement made by the member misleading, did the member know it was misleading, and did he intend to make it in a context that would as a result be misleading the House?

What is clear to me is that, in fact, there is not actually a dispute over the facts. I think it's very clear that there is consensus on the facts. There was not an in-person announcement in Grande Prairie that can be characterized as government business in Grande Prairie. There was a press release, that I suspect went out from Edmonton, that coincided with the plane being in mid-air, but that is not a government announcement in Grande Prairie. Both the member from the Official Opposition as well as the Minister of Justice have essentially just recounted the same facts, that there was, in fact, no government business, no announcement that took place in Grande Prairie.

Unfortunately, yesterday the Minister of Health clearly stated that the plane went up to Grande Prairie because there was government business in Grande Prairie. So on the face of it we have evidence of a statement that was clearly misleading. One has to assume that the minister understands his schedule and was briefed, so he understood that it was misleading. In saying it in the House, we have to assume that he intended to mislead the House. If he had said it outside of the House, then perhaps he wasn't intending to mislead the House. But in answer to a direct question by the Official Opposition leader we have to assume that it was intended to mislead.

Obviously, in the absence of that government business in Grande Prairie, what we did have was an outcome that taxpayer-funded dollars were spent to get a bunch of people up to Grande Prairie at a time when there was no government business but there did happen to be other business that had no business being funded by taxpayer dollars. That is completely and appropriately within the correct confines of the questioning that should occur in this House: whether or not we are responsibly dispensing taxpayer dollars.

So the question was correct. The answer was unfortunately not accurate, and we have to assume that the minister was aware of

that at the time. Then it appropriately raises the question of whether those dollars were appropriately expended and whether or not they ought to have been paid back. But that's another issue.

Thank you for allowing me, Mr. Speaker, to contribute to this debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Are there others?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, just briefly, as I don't want to drag this out. I'm not a lawyer, and I feel like I'm on trial here. You can say what you want, you can call me a liar, but I was at the news conference with a whole roomful of media people. I can probably name some, but going back two years they may not remember. I can guarantee you there was a media announcement there that day with the Premier and with the minister, and I can stand up in here as an eyewitness and confirm that. You can call me a liar if you like. I was there.

Mr. Anderson: I think that, clearly, what was stated in the back and forth was that there was a government announcement – a government announcement – for the new hospital. What this member was just referring to was the pre PC Party fundraising scrum that they do, that took place at the PC event. That is not a government announcement. You need to try to understand that because it really is – the mix between government and party here is very, very clear. There is a terrible mix here. You cannot say that you were at a government announcement when it was the PC Party event, so please take that into consideration.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I'll hear one final comment and hear from the minister who is at the heart of this matter, and that is the Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be as brief as possible, and I appreciate your indulgence. I'm quite frankly shocked at the allegation that's been levelled at me by the member that brought forward this point of privilege. It's obviously his right to do so, and it will be your judgment that prevails in the end.

You know, a number of facts have been presented around the circumstances of that particular day, and I think those have been well explained. I think what I find the most disturbing and perhaps the most offensive here is the allegation by two members that I intentionally misled this House. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I certainly did not mean to mislead the House in any way. We have provided and we can table documents that substantiate both a government news release that was issued that day as well as some of the local media coverage that was provided.

3:20

I think that, as my hon. colleague the Minister of Justice has commented, there was a planned series of announcements that week across the province, beginning in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge on October 18, moving to Grande Prairie, and then concluding in the communities of Hinton and High Prairie and Edson on the following Saturday. Over the course of that week, Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, this government announced literally hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in expansion and renovation in some very key hospitals across the province.

The comments that were made in Grande Prairie were part of that communication strategy around hospital infrastructure. I certainly stand by the statement I made in the House yesterday. While I certainly acknowledge that other members in the House, members opposite, may wish to raise a dispute with respect to use

of government aircraft – and that’s certainly their right to do so – I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that they have either proven nor should they have the right to question my intent and my integrity and to suggest that I have misled the House in order to further that cause, which is an entirely different matter.

So I’ll repeat, Mr. Speaker, that I certainly did in no way intend to mislead the House in the answer that I gave yesterday afternoon. It was an honest answer to the question. The facts and the circumstances that have been explained here I think provide further context to that, and I would certainly respectfully ask you to take these facts into consideration in your ruling.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The deputy House leader for the Official Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, has made a very serious statement and comment; in his words, a point of privilege against the Minister of Health regarding some comments that the minister made yesterday. It pertains to an exchange in this House yesterday dealing with an announcement or not, dealing with a government airplane, dealing with matters related to that particular event that occurred sometime in October. I think October 25 was the date referenced by several members.

We’ve heard now from six different people on this matter, and I listened very carefully. Just so you know, I took my notes as always. I want to begin by saying that the Member for Calgary-Shaw did provide notice in accordance with our rules, and at 10:33 this morning he met the requirements of Standing Order 15(2) with respect to giving at least two hours’ notice before the start of the afternoon proceedings.

I hope not to take up too much time on this matter, but when an allegation is made that someone has misled the House and in particular intentionally misled the House, which I believe is what the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw has said on at least one if not two or three different occasions, that really catches my attention. The reason it does, hon. members, is because frequently we’ll find that one member sees an event or an activity or a statement one way, hears it one way, and another members hears it and interprets it in a different way. So you could argue: well, somebody misled. But it couldn’t be argued that you deliberately misled or that you intentionally misled, could it? You’ve all been on the receiving end of that or on the giving end of it in your own private lives, and it’s no different in here.

Nonetheless, I want to remind you of a couple of things before I rule on this. One is that I have reminded members many times about allegations that you make in this House about this fact, or not a fact, of misleading the Assembly: quite often it’s really a disagreement on facts or a matter of interpretation, as I’ve said. Please be reminded what the Speaker’s role is in the House in general and particularly during question period. It’s set out in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, and it states the following: “The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions.”

Of course, someone else referred to it, and I want to refer to it again. In *Beauchesne*, second edition, paragraph 494 – and I’ve referred to this many times before – it states that the chair often has to accept “two contradictory accounts of the same incident.”

Now, if the member who raised the point of privilege is alleging that the minister deliberately misled the Assembly, then that indeed is a very, very high bar and is almost never made out according to the many rulings that you will have researched as part of your preparation for this point of privilege. In order to

constitute a contempt and to conclude that a member deliberately misled the Assembly, three elements must be met, and members have referred to this in their own words. First, the statement must in fact have been misleading; secondly, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and three, in making such a statement, the member must have intended to mislead the House. I think the Member for Calgary-Shaw tried very hard to do that. He tried to prove his case, as it were. Of course, the case was then argued by three members from the Executive Council to the contrary. Again, we have this contradiction of what people perceive to have been the facts.

Nonetheless, the authorities for this particular test were outlined by me in this House before; in particular, I outlined them on December 3, 2012, when I made a ruling, that you can find at pages 1206 and 1207 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. I’m not going to take the time of the House to repeat them. But I think it is clear that the wording of this particular purported point of privilege isn’t so much a point of privilege even if it was worded somehow else. It could certainly meet the test of having been a point of order, in which case we would have had a clarification not unlike what we just heard, but I cannot see where this, at the moment at least, constitutes a question of privilege.

I did listen very carefully and attentively to everyone who spoke. I have my notes to back this up. I know that there were explanations given about a tragedy that occurred on that day and that that tragedy then led to certain other circumstances having to unfold, certain changes in schedules. I listened carefully when Airdrie mentioned the issue about the location of where a purported or de facto press conference or media conference or whatever you want to call it may or may not have occurred. Other than the fact that there was a tragedy that day, I think it is still, nonetheless, a fair point to remind government about the choice of locations for some of the announcements. It’s clear from what I’ve heard that there may not have been a choice in this one if, in fact, what Airdrie said is true, and I don’t know that. It may come up again later in this session. I’m not sure. But let’s be reminded that there are circumstances that occur in our lives that are, generally speaking, beyond our control. As such, we must accept that the members who spoke, spoke, I hope, with honour and with their own conviction and their own belief.

In this case I do not find there to be a prima facie case that would constitute a point of privilege. So that will conclude this matter today.

Let us move on to points of order, please. We have, I think, four points of order to be heard. The first one, actually, was raised by the hon. Government House Leader, who rose on a point of order against the leader of the Liberal opposition. He has since sent me a note saying that he will withdraw his point of order. So point of order 1 is officially withdrawn by the issuer, and that concludes that matter.

Point of order 2 was raised, I believe, by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. It was raised in response to something that the Minister of Finance had said. That was during a comment that was being delivered at that moment by the leader of the ND opposition, but I don’t think it was in reference to what the ND leader was saying.

I think I’ll allow some people an opportunity to clarify their positions in here. Whoever it was that raised the second point of order – I believe it was the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills – I’ll recognize you in just a moment so that you can state your citation and move on with it at this time.

The hon. member.

3:30

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), and it is in regard to a comment made by the Minister of Finance and then previously, I believe, by the Minister of Education. This year there was an absolute tragedy that occurred in St. Paul. There was a vehicle that drove into a school, with horrific consequences. It was an absolute living nightmare. I was invited as an MLA to go with the Minister of Education along with the Minister of Infrastructure at the time, because it was an important business, of course, but also an emergency. It was an emergency situation where we needed to determine the facts on the ground. The families in that incident suffered enough.

Now, during the debate the Minister of Finance used that tragedy as an excuse for using a government plane to go to a PC fundraiser, and I find it, frankly, appalling, disgusting, and reprehensible. Mr. Speaker, these families have suffered enough. For them to drag this issue into the papers is deplorable, and he should withdraw those comments. If there was any incident in terms of timing and so forth, they should have cancelled the flight to Grande Prairie if there was no announcement to be made. They shouldn't be using a tragedy. They shouldn't be bringing it up in here anymore. Withdraw the comment, sir, and let's just go on. Stop playing politics.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to clarify from the government's position, please.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just did what he is accusing me of doing, and I find that reprehensible. I would suggest that if the Blues were to be reviewed, it would be discovered by this hon. member, if he'd pay attention in this House, that I was referencing the flights, the delay for the Grande Prairie flights, for the government business that was being done in Grande Prairie. I did not bring up the tragedy in a way that would have directed it to the parents, to the children, or to the school. It is – I'm not even going to go there. What is pitiful is that he actually stood on a point of order so that he could stand up and say that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the Blues here from today. In the Blues the Minister of Finance actually stood and said, among other things, in response to the first main question, I think, from the hon. leader of the ND, "I would actually say . . . that one of the flights that was taken on that day was a category flight that is actually for emergencies, which was, as I said, to the incident in St. Paul, where we actually carried one of the hon. members of the opposition."

My own view on this is that a courtesy was extended to you, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you accepted that courtesy, and I think it would behoove all of us to leave that matter as having been clarified and not pursue it any further. I don't see this as a point of order. I do see it as a point of clarification, although perhaps others here might have different versions of it. It seems like a sincere gesture, actually, on both parts. [interjections]

I don't like some of the language that was just used, and I don't like the bantering that's going across the bow right now either. There's just too much of that going on, gentlemen, ladies. Perhaps we could restrict ourselves more to the business of the House

rather than any personal attacks or innuendos or whatever have you.

As such, that concludes that matter, and we'll move to point of order 3. I believe this was raised by Airdrie. Did he withdraw?

Mr. Wilson: On behalf of Airdrie I believe the minister clarified his comments, and ours was withdrawn.

The Speaker: That was my take on it as well. Point of order 3 is officially withdrawn. The statement has been clarified, apologized for, or withdrawn, as the case may be.

We can move on to point of order 4, which was the Minister of Justice on comments during the question by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The third point of order dealt with the use of the term "mislead." I refer you to *Beauchesne* 489, page 146. It indicates that "mislead" is a prohibited term. With respect, it does not matter at all whether this is used towards someone; this is a prohibited term. So I would just simply ask – of course, we just ask to be treated the same as any other party, and since that's been dealt with on our end, I just would ask the member to please withdraw that word.

The Speaker: The hon. deputy House leader for the opposition.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe there is no point of order here. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was simply referring to the story of Pinocchio, and it's pretty difficult to outline the story of Pinocchio without using words something along those lines. She did admittedly use the word "mislead," but I would ask the Speaker in his ruling to look at *Beauchesne* 486(1), for example. "It is impossible to lay down any specific rules in regard to injurious reflections uttered in debate against particular Members." Well, this was not a comment directed to any member. When the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was talking about the story of Pinocchio, she was not referring in any way, shape, or form to anyone on the government benches.

It also suggests that "much depends upon the tone and manner, and intention, of the person speaking." Again, this was not directed at any individual member in this Assembly. It was used in a story. I would ask you to consider the Blues when you look at that if the Justice minister does not agree.

I would also ask you to consider *Beauchesne* 486(2), that says, "An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week." So it's pretty clear that this is no point of order, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I don't believe the hon. Justice minister even gave a citation in our standing orders on which he was rising, but I would ask that you just leave this matter as a point of clarification.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, let me say a couple of things here very briefly. I have the Blues here, and according to the Blues from today the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake stood at approximately 2:32 and in her question referred to two stories that we often tell our children. The first story was something to do with the boy who cried wolf, and the second story was to do with the young boy called Pinocchio. Then she said, "This young boy would mislead everyone he spoke to, and eventually his nose began to grow." At that point a point of order was raised. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake went on and then directed her question to a specific person. In fact, she directed her question to

the Minister of Infrastructure and concluded by saying, “Which story can Albertans believe about this government, the boy who cried wolf or Pinocchio?”

So I would caution you of this convention as a reminder, which I’ve given you before. I won’t take the time to read the whole thing, but please be reminded that you should not attempt to do or infer indirectly what you are specifically disallowed to do directly. We all know the story of Pinocchio. It’s about the young boy who lied, and every time he lied his nose got longer and longer, and by reference to that story you’re implying that someone else might be lying. That is not on in this House; it shouldn’t be on in this House whatsoever.

I will simply say that there is perhaps a dispute about the facts or whatever you might have surrounding the question about building Alberta or whatever it was that was talked about. There is certainly no point of order deep enough for me to call anyone to order on, but I would call you to a reminder, and I would give you a caution about not trying to imply, directly or indirectly, things that otherwise would be out of order.

As such, that concludes this matter, and I think that concludes points of order, and we can move on.

3:40

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 1

Savings Management Act

The Speaker: I believe the hon. President of Treasury Board has the floor now.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s nice to get to the business of the government. I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Premier to move third reading of Bill 1, the Savings Management Act.

Bill 1, as has been described, articulates a vision and a purpose for our savings, allowing them to grow while leveraging a portion of them to support Alberta’s long-term social and economic development. The proposed Savings Management Act will support innovation in the social services and cultural sectors, will help address Alberta’s demand for skilled labour by supporting apprentices, and will position Alberta to take advantage of future, once-in-a-generation strategic opportunities. Together the enhanced Alberta heritage scholarship fund, the social innovation endowments, the agriculture and food innovation endowments, and the Alberta future fund will help secure a brighter future for our province.

Rather than providing a rehashed summary of each fund, I would like to address three areas of concern that came up in debate: the social innovation endowment and its potential connection to social impact bonds, the Alberta future fund, and the heritage fund. In a broad sense the social innovation endowment will increase the capacity of the social services and cultural sectors to innovate, supporting new ideas, risk sharing, and creative collaboration within the nonprofit sector. The social innovation endowment will support new knowledge, prototyping, and the design and testing of new funding models and service delivery approaches that will improve outcomes for Albertans. In short, it’s about finding better ways of doing things, not just throwing more money at existing approaches.

Social impact bonds are just one of the many possible alternatives to traditional financing that may be considered. No decisions have been made regarding the use of social impact

bonds or any other alternative funding model. Several funding models will be reviewed, with the focus on assessing the potential of each to improve social outcomes for Albertans. Countries like the U.S., U.K., and Australia have developed programs involving social financing as a way to achieve social outcomes. As part of Alberta’s own review of alternative funding models, the experiences of other jurisdictions are being carefully studied to see what lessons can be drawn from them.

With respect to the Alberta future fund there has been some concern expressed about its broad spending parameters. At this time the government does not have any specific uses in mind. The intent of the Alberta future fund is to support investments that are transformative in nature and provide long-term, ongoing benefits to Albertans and the Alberta economy. Because these kinds of opportunities may arise unexpectedly, it is important that the government have some flexible funds in place for this purpose. You can’t budget for these kinds of opportunities, but you can set aside money for them so you’re ready to act when the time comes. The Alberta future fund will be established as an account within the heritage fund, and that money will stay there and grow until the right opportunity comes along. If one doesn’t come along, the fund will keep growing. A resolution of the Legislature is needed before any money can be transferred from this fund, so there will be an opportunity to debate the merits of proposed disbursements from the fund.

The other thing that came up in debate that I would like to address is the concern about leveraging a portion of our savings in the heritage fund to establish these endowments and funds. The vision proposed by the Savings Management Act in many ways reflects the Lougheed government’s original vision for the Alberta heritage fund. When the heritage fund was established in 1976, the fund’s stated objectives were to save for the future, strengthen or diversify the economy, and improve the quality of life for Albertans.

Over the years the heritage fund has been used for a variety of purposes, including capital projects like parks and museums and hospitals. To this day it supports medical and scientific research and scholarships, and in more recent years net income from the fund has supported general government operations.

I think a lot of that anxiety around leveraging the heritage fund is rooted in the fear that our savings will not grow. They will. Apart from the legislative-authorized disbursements from the new accounts, the net income of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund will remain subject to the provisions of the Fiscal Management Act. The provisions require that by 2017-18 and in all subsequent years, 100 per cent of the heritage fund’s net income will be retained within the fund, and as set out in our legislated savings plan, we will set aside a portion of our nonrenewable resource revenue for savings right off the top, so the heritage fund and our total savings will continue to grow.

As I conclude my remarks, I go back to what I heard from Albertans. They want us to save, but they want to know what we’re saving for. In public forums like budget consultations and the economic summit last year many Albertans expressed support for using a portion of our savings for strategic, future-oriented investments. Bill 1 reflects this desire by defining and implementing a renewed vision and purpose for a portion of our savings. The targeted endowments and funds it creates will encourage innovation in agriculture and social services, support trades-focused education to address the demand for skilled labour, and position Alberta to capitalize on future strategic opportunities. I encourage members of

this Assembly to join me in supporting this important future-oriented bill to create an even brighter future for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

The Speaker: Is it Bill 2 or Bill 3 that you're going for?

Mr. Horner: You said 2?

The Speaker: Bill 2 was indicated. Do you wish to go there, hon. minister?

Mr. Horner: I'm ready to do whatever you wish, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you. It is my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 2, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014.

I now move to adjourn the debate on Bill 2.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3

Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be my day.

I am pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 3, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 3 supports Canada's international commitments to reduce systemic risk and strengthen the regulation and oversight of over-the-counter derivatives. We've learned some important lessons from the 2008 financial crisis, and jurisdictions across Canada continue to make reform of securities regulation a priority.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo was quite correct in his assessment of the severity of the 2008 financial crisis and that a lack of regulation was a major factor in that event. That's why, following that crisis, the International Organization of Securities Commissions introduced several new principles relating to the reduction of systemic risk, and in tandem with that, the G20 made recommendations to improve the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives markets. Canada along with the rest of the G20 countries committed to strengthen the regulation of this type of investment, and provincial governments and regulators are putting harmonized rules into place for this type of instrument.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre expressed a lot of concerns about the derivatives market and stressed the importance of an international agreement on how we're going to deal with these instruments given the global nature of the market and the size of the companies involved. That's why new regulatory environments for over-the-counter derivatives are being implemented across the world with three core requirements: trading through a derivatives exchange or trading platform, clearing trades through central counterparties, and reporting of all derivatives transactions to a trade repository.

This will ensure a high level of co-operation and collaboration and information sharing between the regulators, which should result in better identification, management, and reduction of systemic risk. Better oversight and regulation is a plus, Mr. Speaker, and will lead to better markets for all. Alberta is the second-largest capital market in Canada, and for the last three years the World

Bank has ranked Canada as one of the top five countries for protecting investors, ahead of the United States and the United Kingdom.

We want to build on that success, and that's why the government of Alberta and the Alberta Securities Commission are committed to continuous improvement of our highly regarded securities regulatory system. Bill 3 reflects that co-operative spirit and commitment. As the Member for Airdrie put it, this is a good example of how the Canadian system of provincial jurisdiction over securities regulation can work in the international marketplace.

I therefore move third reading and ask that all Members of the Legislative Assembly would support Bill 3 so the Alberta Securities Commission and securities regulators from other provinces can get on with their work of developing and implementing harmonized rules for the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:50 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments to be offered? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 5 just in general. I haven't had the opportunity to respond to the overall budget, and I'd like to just provide a few of those general comments before speaking directly to Bill 5.

Of course, prior to the election, Mr. Chair, the Premier stated: debt is the death of countless dreams; we can have all the infrastructure we need without going into debt. That was then; this is now. The new slogan that the Premier and her handlers are pushing is: debt is hope. Debt is hope.

Mr. Chair, I just find it quite alarming, the stark difference between an election period and then after an election period. We don't need to go into debt. We'll never go into debt. Now debt is hope. It must be coming from some of her well-paid staffers who came from Ontario. They're pushing this type of thing. I don't think it's a good signal to send to future generations.

Mr. Chair, the expectation now is that this PC government will go \$21 billion into debt. Twenty-one billion dollars. That's \$14 million a day. I don't think anyone who watched the Premier in the last election came to any conclusion that she along with her cabinet and her MLAs were going to plunge the province into that much debt.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that when I go to constituents and I go to the coffee shops and I do my town halls and I ask them, you know, "There is record revenue in this province, the highest revenues that we've ever had; should we have to go into debt?" they state singlehandedly or almost all the time, "No."

Mr. Chair, what is interesting is that combined with the debt that they're going into, they're also under Bill 1 creating a system of endowments, and what's quite interesting is that that promise to go to endowments actually came from the 2004 Liberal campaign, the provincial one, with Kevin Taft, and it was subsequently the Liberal campaign promise in 2008. So we know where the brain trust is with this current government. They're cherry-picking election promises right from the Liberal Party of Alberta platform.

Mr. Chair, this is the seventh consecutive deficit despite record revenues. I just cannot support plunging this province right into debt.

An Hon. Member: Is it a deficit?

Mr. Saskiw: You know, the question of whether or not it's a deficit is an interesting one. Because they have three separate books, because they're, you know, doing things with all these books, putting numbers here, there, and everywhere, a lot of Albertans – the Auditor General, in fact, has stated that it's very difficult to figure out whether it's a deficit or a surplus. But what we see if you look at the money coming in versus the money coming out: it's a massive, massive deficit.

Mr. Chair, going to Bill 5 itself, of course, because of this government's spending, there are appropriations and so forth that must take place. Again, I cannot stand by while this government states: debt is hope. I won't support the budget on this particular bill. I look forward to the debate and any possible amendments that go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No other comments or questions to be offered?

Okay. In that case, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Am I to be adjourning this when I'm finished? Yes? Okay. I will do that.

Bill 5 is essentially the government's request to get some money before the budget passes, so it is, in essence, I guess, a pro rata allocation of the budget that we will be discussing over the course of the next month. Obviously, by voting in favour of this, we are essentially endorsing the budget that was introduced just a few days ago.

I know the leader of my party will soon be talking about what he thinks about that budget, but I felt that this was an opportunity as well for me to outline a few of the primary failings of this budget and to suggest why, then, we have some difficulty in supporting Bill 5, the effective allocation of funds into the future on the basis of this particular configuration. Of course, we want dollars to continue to flow, and we're always going to support dollars continuing to flow. However, we do need to note that the underlying assumptions on these dollars continuing to flow are problematic for us.

Now, I'm obviously not going to do a line-by-line discussion about that – we will have opportunity to do that later on in this session, when we have more discussion about the budget – but I did want to talk about a few things that I was concerned about based on what I've heard from people in my constituency as well as what I have heard about from stakeholders who are participating in the areas that I'm the critic for.

One of the things, of course, is the failure to completely restore the funding to postsecondary education that is part of this budget. We know that certain bits and pieces have been pulled together through sort of the reopening of the access to the future fund, and we know that there was an ever so slight increase, less than the cost of living in Alberta but an ever so slight increase. But when you put that together with the massive cuts last year, even notwithstanding the partial restoration partway through the year, we're still left in a situation where our postsecondary sector is struggling and where many critical components of our post-secondary sector have been rendered inaccessible to Alberta students. At a time when, you know, the government would argue that the economy is healthy and our budget is healthy, one questions why it is that we would be so miserly with the

postsecondary system given that it is such an important vehicle for growing and expanding opportunity and prosperity for all Albertans, not just a select few but for all. So the failure to fully restore funding, to maintain the level of funding that was actually promised in the last election, is disappointing to me.

The other thing that is truly disappointing to me in this budget, of course, is the abject failure to address the issue of child poverty and the fact that it is combined with significant cuts to programs that would otherwise help to at least reduce or limit child poverty. We're cutting those programs at the same time that the government is claiming that they're concerned about child poverty, which is problematic for me and for many, many Albertans. It seems very hypocritical. Again, at a time when the government claims that the province is wealthy and prosperous and we have all these great opportunities and we're building Alberta, it seems that we're just building Alberta for people who can afford the entrance requirements and the entrance fee to the various and sundry buildings, but we're not really building Alberta for all Albertans, just a select few. So the failure to address the child poverty issue in this budget makes me concerned about endorsing the budget through supporting this bill, Bill 5.

The other thing that we didn't do in this budget was give adequate funding to our K to 12 education system. We know that our class sizes are growing, and we have a Minister of Education who claims: "Ah, well, class sizes. That's last year's concern. Class sizes have no impact on the quality of education." Well, you know, Mr. Chair, they do. By failing to keep up with population growth and with cost of living and inflation and by also failing to look at the change in the makeup of our student population, the increased pressures that come from our growing new Canadian population and the increased needs that they have to ensure that they have the same opportunities that our parents and grandparents did – those costs are also not reflected in the changes to the Education budget.

4:00

I'm also concerned about the fact that this government has contemplated significant increases in economic activity, particularly in the oil and gas sector, but we do not see an equivalent increase in the investments into protecting our air and our land and our water. If you assume for the moment that our efforts to protect our air and our land and our water for future generations are adequate – I would argue they are not – as business grows, as the applications grow, as the amount of industrial activity grows, so too should the investment in protecting the environment, yet it is staying static. That is, I think, a profound failure and a recipe for continuing the bad record and the ultimately economically negative outcomes that arise from our haphazard and negligent environmental policy. That is concerning.

Another thing that is concerning to me about this budget is the fact that, notwithstanding that everybody has talked about how they've made this offer and that offer at whatever table, what we do have is a piece of legislation that calls for wage freezes, and we also have a budget that presumes wage freezes for public-sector employees. We also have a budget that appears to support what we believe is coming with respect to pension reform, and we know that that is going to be extremely damaging to public-sector employees and to their families and ultimately to seniors in Alberta. Those are some of the main areas that I'm concerned about and that I hear about a lot in my community.

We are also concerned about the failure to fully restore funding to PDD, persons with developmental disabilities, as a result of the cuts that were made last year. You know, some of that funding was restored, but not all of it was restored. Once again, that

assumes that everything was working just tickety-boo before the cuts were made, which, to be clear, Mr. Chair, was certainly not the case.

What needs to happen in order to ensure that we do invest in the prosperity of all Albertans, not just a select few, is that we need a budget that amends our revenue side, that looks at fair taxation instead of flat taxation, which simply benefits the very elite few. We need to review that. We need to review the fact that we have a royalty regime that collects less money than any other royalty regime in the world. We need to look at that side of the budget. We are structurally broken in terms of our revenue stream, and the consequence of that is the slow depreciation of the public services that Albertans rely on in order to provide growth, prosperity, and opportunity equally to all Albertans across the board.

With those comments in place, I just feel that I can't vote in favour of Bill 5 because it would appear to endorse a fundamentally broken monetary plan.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on this.

Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 5 in Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Hon. Government House Leader, you wish to move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 5?

Mr. Campbell: Yeah. We move to rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if you'll take your seats, please.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Having heard the report by the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, does the House concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

11. Mr. Horner moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the speech of the Finance minister and President of Treasury Board on the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I expected more, and I think Albertans expected more. We all know that we live in an incredibly prosperous province. Not only do we have resource wealth, but we also have

vibrant, diverse, and growing communities. The opportunities in Alberta are not limited. In fact, they are rich with possibility. In spite of all of this it's disturbing that these doors of possibility are not open to us all. For too many Albertans these doors are shut completely.

We are truly living in a tale of two Albertas. In one Alberta the opportunities are endless and the PC government works hard to open doors for their friends and supporters. It's the best of times to be a Conservative insider. In the other Alberta, where the majority of us live, it is the worst of times to be a middle-class family or to be in need of support and services this government exists to provide. At every turn this PC government has chosen to do what is in their own best interests instead of doing what it could to make the lives of ordinary Albertans just a little easier.

Budget 2014 is no different, so I say again: I expected more. Albertans deserve more. The latest budget is a prime example of how out of touch the government is. This government has continued its attack on everyday Alberta families while making sure the richest Albertans and corporations are well looked after. The budget abandons middle-class and vulnerable citizens. In this PC government the rich get richer. Budget 2014 includes \$150 million of in-kind royalties, which should be paying us for our natural resources, not the other way around. The University of Alberta has specifically asked the minister to reinvest in their infrastructure maintenance program in order to avoid the catastrophic failure of some of their building systems. Instead, the budget allocates \$8.6 million of postsecondary education to corporate subsidies to industry instead of to the institutions themselves.

While mired in expense controversy, the Premier's office's budget sees a \$1-million increase. There's money in the budget to open three new international offices in Brazil, California, and China, which can only mean the creation of more plum and pricey patronage appointments for the PC government's friends. I might just point out, Mr. Speaker, that the capital of Brazil is Brasilia, the main business centre is Sao Paolo, and the main tourist mecca is Rio de Janeiro, and that's where the government is putting its business office. In California the state capital is Sacramento, and the main business centre, of course, is Los Angeles, but they're putting it in scenic San Francisco.

Meanwhile in this PC government's Alberta the middle class gets squeezed. There's no funding for full-day kindergarten, so parents are forced to pay more in child care costs. After threatening for a third time to change the seniors' drug benefit program and having his office occupied as a result, the Minister of Health promised to once again scrap the changes. But this year the program's budget was cut by \$120 million. Despite a \$147-million cut to postsecondary last year, this budget does not provide a sufficient reinvestment in postsecondary education. Our colleges and universities will remain inaccessible to too many students and will remain unnecessarily costly to everyone else. Of the more than a billion dollars the federal government just gave the province specifically for health care, only \$600 million went directly to the health budget. The balance remains unaccounted for.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, this government simply can't be trusted. On February 26 the Minister of Finance gleefully announced that all the fearmongering around the bitumen bubble and the passing of Budget 2013, with a significant operational deficit, was for naught. Resource revenues were up, he said. An operational surplus was guaranteed, he said. So Albertans like myself dared hope that with the extra revenue coming in, Budget 2014 was finally the

time when the PC government would help families and vulnerable citizens. Instead, they've been left behind yet again and will see tough times ahead.

Mr. Speaker, 400,000 Albertans live in poverty. They rely on government services and programs to survive and get the hand up that will take them out of the cycle of poverty. This government was elected on promises to support these vulnerable Albertans, but now, three budgets later, the PC government appears committed to the exact opposite. The government has clearly given up on their promise to eliminate child poverty by 2017 since there's still no strategy, no plan, and no money. Last year Albertans rallied at the Legislature week after week in opposition to enormous cuts to services for persons with developmental disabilities. Instead of learning their lesson, the government cut \$20 million from the program in this budget.

Albertans believe in fairness and hard work. They also believe in accountability, transparency, and responsible spending. Poverty costs \$7 billion a year in increased demands for public services. The most responsible and effective investment in poverty reduction that this government can make is in programs to help low-income families get out of poverty by developing job skills and furthering their education. But what has the government done instead, Mr. Speaker? They've cut up to 50 per cent from the budgets of these proven poverty reduction strategies. It's a shame.

In a fit of spin the government boastfully announced the creation of two new endowment funds in this budget. Now, it may be of some value, but it will also provide cover for the government repeating another conservative government's mistake. The U.K.-tested social impact bonds are a way of encouraging corporations to invest in social programming. Programs that met specific targets were deemed successful, and their investors were paid dividends. The PC government seized the idea of these bonds as the Holy Grail of divesting themselves of their responsibility to fund and provide effective social services. Funding will come from the incentivized private sector, and services will be provided by the eager not-for-profit sector. All the government has to do is sit back and watch.

Mr. Speaker, we can do much better, and we have to. After all, we know that the U.K. experiment has already failed. Putting a price tag on poverty alleviation and promising investors big returns guarantees that only the safe programs – that is, good investments – will be funded. Poverty and the people living in it thereby become a new stock to be traded, bought, and sold. It's disturbing on many levels. Albertans living in poverty do not have the time for the government to reinvent the wheel and try out hare-brained schemes that have failed elsewhere.

The government seems, Mr. Speaker, terribly proud of themselves for keeping their social services budget from expanding to meet the needs of inflation and population growth. How underfunding the needs of a growing province is worth bragging about I do not pretend to understand. It becomes clearer by the day and some days by the hour that this government does not understand the priorities of Albertans. Spending the equivalent of an average public servant's yearly salary on a weekend trip, spending a quarter of that yearly salary on a minister's office redecoration, spending an exorbitant amount of money on severances: that's not what Albertans want. That's not what they voted for. I don't think that Albertans will tolerate it much longer.

Albertans see rising debt and decreasing levels of service, and they are at best confused and at worse very angry. We are not concerned about borrowing funds to finance capital projects. It's the norm in municipal governments and in other provinces in this country. It stretches the financial responsibility to future generations who will benefit from the project. What we need to make

sure we have, Mr. Speaker, is an adequate plan to repay that debt, funds set aside to make sure that that happens, and a cap on the total amount of capital debt that can be incurred. We have not seen any of those things so far.

It's fine to have more schools and modernizations, but school boards have pointed out that those are the schools that we needed yesterday. By the time these schools are built, we'll need another 50. What we're really concerned about is the lack of consultation in deciding infrastructure priorities. The Lethbridge public school board has had Galbraith elementary school at the top of their renovation list for nearly a decade, yet it remains untouched and unsupported by this government.

What we're concerned about is that the building Alberta plan seems to be a no-limit, all-you-can-eat buffet. There's no ceiling for the borrowing needed to complete the plan, and there's no plan to pay down the growing debt. But this government isn't really known as wise stewards of our collective resources. Day after day this government issues press releases claiming to have been elected to, quote, live within our means, yet their entitlement seems to know no bounds.

The 2014 budget lays the groundwork for more wage freezes for public-sector workers. Despite ongoing bargaining with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and the United Nurses of Alberta, the government has not budgeted for moderate and reasonable changes to the contracts of public-sector workers. It's hard to bargain in good faith when the government has declared their position in the budget. Of course, given their track record, expecting this government to bargain in good faith with their own employees is just expecting too much.

Labour relations in this province are in serious trouble. Not only has the government's non-existent commitment to fair bargaining been called out by the courts, but this PC government also plans to undercut the retirement security of hundreds and thousands of Albertans. The public-sector pension plans are the foundation of nearly 300,000 Albertans' retirement savings. Without offering any clear evidence, this PC government is breaking the promise they made to generations of public employees in claiming a looming crisis for the pension funds, yet financial experts agree that Alberta's public pension funds are among the most stable in North America.

Too many Albertans are worried about retirement security. What is needed more than anything is a major increase in the Canada pension plan. Yet alone among the provinces it's been the government of Alberta that has blocked negotiations at the national level for a major reform of the Canada pension plan. This government is committed not to retirement security for all Albertans and Canadians but exactly the opposite.

It was interesting to read the consultation document that the government prepared based on their consultations ahead of this budget. The government heard the same things that the NDP caucus did when they were touring the province and talking to citizens. We found that Albertans prioritize funding for core services like health care and education and that more than half want to see funding increases for these sectors. So did the government. We found that almost half of Albertans want to see an increase in funding to protect our air, water, and land for future generations, and so did the government. We found that increasing support for seniors, students, and the vulnerable are priorities for Albertans. So, Mr. Speaker, did the government. I would be remiss if I did not point out that these are precisely the priorities of Alberta's New Democrat opposition, yet they are not the priorities of this government as evidenced by Budget 2014.

We think there's a way to make it happen. We just need to get off the revenue roller coaster. With more than 30 per cent of our program funding dependent on fluctuating royalty revenue that is unpredictable and tied to the whims of the global resource market, it's impossible to create and sustain the world-class health care, education, and social services that Albertans expect and deserve. Minor changes to Alberta's corporate tax and royalty system would ensure that our province remains the most competitive place to do business yet would bring in significantly higher revenues that would not be subject to the fluctuations of our royalty resource revenue. Minor changes to Alberta's personal tax system would see everybody pay their fair share, would give a tax break to the middle class, and would make sure that we had significantly more revenue to pay for ongoing program expenditures. All of this can be done and still retain the most competitive tax structure in the entire country.

4:20

But this government isn't interested in doing the job they were elected to do. Instead, they're grasping at any opportunity to download their responsibilities so that they can focus on what they're actually good at, taking care of their friends. Budget 2014 moves the province closer to privatized land titles, privatized lab services, and privatized social services. Mr. Speaker, none of these things are necessary. None of these things are in the public interest. All of them are in the interests of the friends and insiders associated with this long-in-the-tooth PC government.

Mr. Speaker, the entire billion dollars that was provided in additional transfer funding from the federal government should have been allocated to the front line of our health services. Instead, only \$600 million of that billion was allocated to the health system at all. It could have been invested in quality, public long-term care beds for our seniors. It could have been invested in home care. It could have reduced the cost of prescription drugs borne by seniors and low-income Albertans. It could have supported mental health care. It could have been used to address the shortage of health care professionals working in our province. It could have kept lab services public.

That billion dollars could have renovated the Misericordia hospital, which is in dire need of asbestos removal and repairs to elevators, floors, roofs, and plumbing. The minister claims that the money has been spent, but it's totally inadequate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. The member was about to start talking about how current funding, I believe for the Misericordia, was deeply inadequate, and I would like to hear more about the foundation for that assertion from the member.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister claimed the other day that there is money in the budget allocated for this, but it is a fraction of what is required. There's so much more to be done. I suggest that one of our capital city's hospitals has become the icon of PC neglect. It could have been fixed in the budget, but it wasn't.

Mr. Speaker, while we're living in the tale of two Albertas, Albertans also have the choice of two Albertas before them. Our prosperous province can continue down this road, paved by the conservative choices and priorities of the government and its

disgruntled cousins in the Official Opposition, or our province can choose a new progressive path marked out by hard-working and trustworthy representatives with Alberta values, momentum, and leadership.

The Alberta New Democrats will continue to fight for middle-class families who are squeezed by PC policies and to stand up for vulnerable Albertans who were attacked in this year's budget. We will continue to put forward common-sense solutions to correct the missteps of this PC government. We will remain the champions of everyday Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Are there other speakers to Motion 11? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to be able to respond to the budget speech that was delivered last week by this long-running PC government. I've been here since 2008 now, and I get the sense that regardless of what the budget is, you tend to hear a speech that trumpets the fiscal competence of this government regardless of the situation, regardless of what the budget says, regardless of what the outside world may comment about our fiscal prudence. A couple of examples of that. We can go back to 2008. Largely, for my course of time here there have been deficit budgets. We've seen year after year the government go through deficits, largely snowing through a contingency account that was at one time \$26 billion, I think.

In this budget we finally get here, and through some new voodoo accounting or changing of the Fiscal Management Act, we come up with – I think even the numbers are fairly clear when it's all said and done – a \$3.9 billion debt or deficit, actually, for this year despite the government's best efforts in saying that, you know, we're in a surplus. I, frankly, question that. We also acknowledge in this budget that by the end of 2017 we will be approximately 21 and a half billion dollars in debt. Is that all?

I guess, you know, despite the evidence of what I've seen in front of me for the last seven years, like I said, we still get these budget speeches that say that things are great here, that we're prudent financial managers, despite all contrary, objective evidence. And that's starting to appear. The rest of the world knows that when the government says it, it reminds them of the story about Pinocchio, to reference what we were discussing earlier.

An Hon. Member: The story.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, the story.

You see it in *The Economist* magazine, where they write that Alberta is a clear example of how not to run an oil and gas economy in terms of saving royalties for future generations and taking a fiscally responsible approach to things, paying for what you use out of taxes that you raise. If the government wants to provide a program, well, my goodness, you'd better tax for it. If you want to keep low taxes, well, then you don't provide the service. It's pretty simple, and it's pretty clear that we have not done that kind of budgeting or accounting. You know, I think people here know full well that there is a difference here in the amount of services we provide and the amount of services that we actually collect taxes for. There's a large spread between those, depending on what the year is, of around \$12 billion. That spread is not changing despite what we see before us in this budget.

What has that led to here? Well, it has not only led to what I see as a compounding debt number, but it has also led to a real inability for us to do what we need to do today to ensure that we

are getting the education system we need for our children, the postsecondary system we need for our young adults, the long-term care system we need for our elderly, and the poverty relief we need for those 400,000 Albertans who are living in that state of existence who we were led to believe in the last election this government was going to start caring about. It's not just all debt. It's got a human cost to it, this budget.

Let's go through the numbers in terms of our education system. Since the time I got here, especially since about 2009-2010, we have started cutting our Education budgets. You can see and the evidence is clear that we have roughly, by some estimates, 51,000 more students in our system, with relatively few teachers added to the system. Any way you cut it, though, the children of today have been shortchanged by this government compared to what other elementary kids and children have gotten before in their education system in dollars allocated to them.

Let's be clear. What else is troubling as a result of our current budgeting? Well, we were promised 50 schools in the last election. I know that the hon. Minister of Infrastructure tries to put on a brave face and says that these schools will be built by 2016, but we all know – at least I know, and maybe the hon. Premier is going to tell me differently – that we will not have one of these 50 new schools that was promised built by the next election.

4:30

I also look at some other things going on in this province that are really having a human capacity issue. We promised to get a handle on child poverty, a real issue. That, I felt, was an excellent promise that was made by this government in the last election. We have not begun to follow through on doing some things that would actually start allowing people to move from that symptom. You know, look at the bill we have today, the social infrastructure bonds. I guess we could say: that's doing something. I'm not so sold on whether it actually is. I think it's a distraction for the government, to allow them to say that they're doing things about child poverty or the like without actually putting government muscle into it.

There are things we could actually be doing here in Alberta. We have the lowest Alberta Works payments of any of the provinces by a country mile. You can go google the statistics. You know, if you're a single mother with a child, you're receiving heart-wrenchingly low income support. That just drives me insane. Look, if we really want to do something about it, let's revamp our Alberta Works system and actually look at what the poor are getting and factor in that Alberta is a high-rent place and that you're simply not able to make it. That would be an actual, tangible issue where you could say: yes, our poor are doing better. Okay? You don't need a social infrastructure bond or something like that to do that. You need to get people a cheque in their hand and say: they're going to live better. That is one mechanism we could do on that front pretty easily.

If we wanted to move young families out of poverty, well, look no farther than developing our daycare spaces, okay? Right now there's a shortage of daycare spaces, and they're costing \$1,700 a month per daycare space for one child in the city of Calgary. If we're looking at it, is that really affordable for most people in the city of Calgary who are wanting to get out and work, to build their lives, to build their families, to get out of poverty? Probably not.

You know, if we really look at systems that may actually move society forward, there are opportunities to do that out in the world. Quebec has moved to a learn-through-play daycare system that, if you do the math, after some government seed money, inside of five to six years is largely revenue neutral. It allows young mothers and families to get out and work and have their children

looked after in a learn-through-play environment that allows them to flourish. In my view, one of the reasons why Quebec seems to be rising in the PISA rankings and Alberta may be going the other way – and there are lots of different reasons for this – is that Quebec is now 15 years into a learn-through-play program, that has given their children an opportunity to learn. I think that piece has really set their society on a course and a trajectory forward on the educational front.

I look at investments like that. That would be substantial if you want to move child poverty, that initiative, forward. That would be real government muscle, going ahead and doing something, not saying that you're going to do something but actually doing something. That's the failure.

We can go down the list. Postsecondary education: you know, we can say that, well, we had to do it, but we cut postsecondary dramatically in the 2013 budget. Was it really flourishing before that? We already, before that cut, had the lowest university participation rate of any province on a per capita basis. So, really, it's not like we were doing exceptionally well there before we whacked that budget by 7 and a half per cent, whatever it was, and whatever we kick back into it simply doesn't even catch up to where it was. It was already underperforming in giving Alberta citizens an opportunity to develop their postsecondary skills.

These are the real, day-to-day opportunities that we've missed out on over the last 10 years. Why did we miss out on them? It's because we simply refused to – yes, you get it – tax people here in this province, guys, and it's not just me saying it. It's your former Finance ministers, from Jim Dinning to Ron Liepert to Ted Morton to Shirley McClellan, who all say: we have a revenue problem. Well, come on, guys. The jig is up. You know what I'm saying. You know, we could have actually done this at some point in time, and that would have allowed us to not only do better today but allowed us to do better tomorrow, okay? Those are two things I cannot countenance us sacrificing on.

The government of the day chose, I think, instead to make a calculation. Instead of solving the elephant in the room, the problem that no one likes to talk about, our revenue streams, they kicked that down the curb. My greatest worry is that we are just going to move into a cycle again where, possibly four, five years down the road here, we in this Legislature – some of us will move on; some of us may be here – will think we're wealthy again. We'll think: "Oh, my goodness, we have all these revenues here. We'll do that project, that project, this project." It'll be like the good old days in 2001 – I think some of you guys were here – when we thought that this would never end, but if we haven't learned by now that this is going to end, I don't know when we will.

My greatest sadness is that because we didn't rectify it here, I don't think we'll get another opportunity. I think that by the time we've figured out, next time, that we're not creating permanent wealth in this province but merely running from problem to problem, false success to false success or the like – that is my true worry. We really could have had an opportunity to fix things. I hear the Wildrose say: we want predictable, sustainable funding. Well, when you guys say that, too, you guys know you can't have it without . . . [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired] Whatever.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't resist. I would just like to hear what you were about to say about how we can't have sustainable funding because . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: When we talk about sustainable funding, Mr. Speaker, just so the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is clear, what we're referring to is from tax revenue.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'll make this pretty simple. Right now we have a difference between our tax code and Saskatchewan's. Saskatchewan is the second-lowest tax jurisdiction. If we adopted theirs lock, stock, and barrel, we'd bring in about \$11 billion more in taxes. That says to me that we are roughly \$11 billion undertaxed here, okay? Call me crazy for suggesting that. So we have that gap. We provide roughly the same services to our citizens as the government of Saskatchewan does. We just spend all of it on royalties.

Although the Wildrose has plans on how they're going to limit spending to population growth for now and forever and a day and all that stuff and never do anything besides their 10-year plan to build infrastructure and the like, what you're going to find if – and I stress: if – you get into government is that, simply put, the pressures of the electorate are far too great to limit it to that for very long.

4:40

I'd look at a Premier who thought he probably could do that, the Klein government between '94 and about '97. After that, the pressures of governing became too great. You either have to do some things to – you'll find out that government programs, some of them, actually work, okay? They actually make people's lives better. They actually make things more efficient. Investing in schools and hospitals and policing is what your citizens want. It actually leads to better results in the long term. I think that's what you're going to find out if – and I stress: if – you're going to get to government. And then what happens? Well, because five or six years from now we may be in a position where there is more money available from nonrenewable resource revenue, then that temptation is there.

I realize this tale I'm saying is all about what they've done over the course of the last 42 years. But unless you deal with that predictable, sustainable funding and that gap – you know, you can never get predictable, sustainable funding if your budget consists largely of oil and gas revenues. If we go down to \$75 oil this year, which doesn't look like it's going to happen but if it does, where does the predictable, sustainable funding go next year? It goes out the door for these guys. It goes out the door for you guys. There are just no ifs, ands, or buts about it. So we're kidding ourselves if we want predictable, sustainable funding without actually talking about taxes. You're kidding yourself.

You know, I'm 44 years old. I'm getting too old to kid myself. I'm surprised that many people in this room continue to do so. It's really beyond me. Instead of going out and leading for something better and trying to do something, this government chose not to do that. I'm very disappointed in that because – guess what? – I was hoping they would. I hoped they would solve some problems that they saw out there. They chose not to. I don't know if the next government is going to be afforded a unique opportunity like this to fix the problem. Sometimes governments can only solve problems when a crisis emerges. If the crisis goes away, well, no one will think it's a problem anymore.

Anyway, that's why I don't think it's possible. I think there are actually pressures to governing that are out there. I have a sense

that if we didn't get a handle on it here, we might just be destined to spend it all on one generation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a pleasure, as always.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There's still some time left if there are others under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this Chamber today to respond to the government's Budget 2014 with, like many Albertans, mixed feelings. In its throne speech a week ago this government affirmed its pledge to work with Albertans, new and old, who desire to build a stronger, modern, better province together. There are funding commitments identified in Budget 2014 that are consistent with the government's theme of building Alberta that will be well received by my constituents and, therefore, merit recognition in my remarks. But there is also a great deal that is missing in this budget that is important not only to the residents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo but to all Albertans, especially when we acknowledge that as much as 30 per cent of government revenues originate in northeastern Alberta, which is home to no more than 3 per cent of the population.

As I said just two days ago in my response to the throne speech in a phrase that becomes less meaningful only because it's too familiar, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is the economic engine of Alberta. I would like to preface my remarks this afternoon with a few statistics that help to illustrate what that actually means rather than being obscured behind the foggy thinking that is encouraged by clichés.

We in Alberta, our ambitions to economic diversification notwithstanding, are for the present tied to the petroleum industry as by far the single largest contributor to our envied prosperity. Oil sands production a decade ago was barely 1 million barrels per day. Production will top 2 million barrels per day for the first time this spring. In another decade projects that have already received regulatory approval will drive production up to more than 3 million barrels of oil per day. Some analysts suggest that Alberta oil sands account for almost 10 per cent of Canada's GDP. Round it up because of the discontinued penny, and 10 cents of every dollar in your pocket is derived from oil sands activity.

The Canadian Energy Research Institute estimates capital investment in Alberta's oil sands over the next 25 years to exceed \$200 billion, equivalent to running the entire province of Alberta for five years under Budget 2014. That investment is estimated by CERI to generate \$350 billion in royalties and \$122 billion in municipal tax revenues across Alberta. This mind-boggling economic activity helps to explain why the region's permanent population has tripled in just over a decade and why there are as many as 60,000 people, many of them flying in and out of Alberta and paying personal income tax in different jurisdictions, who may be living in camp accommodations throughout our region, which is not even mentioned that the total camp accommodations capacity in Wood Buffalo as of this past Christmas reached 90,000.

The province's heavy reliance on oil sands revenues, indeed Canada's reliance on the oil sands is why our governments have become so focused on issues like market access and the bitumen bubble, impediments to our prosperity that must be solved beyond our borders. Oil sands growth is also why, I think, the Premier announced two years ago that the province's focus on capital investment was going to shift to include strategic economic investment to lay the foundations to grow our economy. In many ways the spending in Wood Buffalo announced by the government since

2008 to address accumulated infrastructure deficit of colossal proportion – Fort McMurray had become, after all, the nexus of a global tempest to develop oil sands resources – has enabled my community and, by extension, the expectations of all Albertans only to catch up to 2010, perhaps 2011, and we have just turned the page on the calendar for 2014.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge again this government's commitment to twinning the portion of highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray by 2016. The government first committed to twinning highway 63 nearly a decade ago. This highway is, of course, the singular corridor for the safe movement of goods, services, and people in and out of Wood Buffalo. It's also the primary route for the arrival in Wood Buffalo of almost 5,000 modules, not tractor-trailer units or trucks carrying large loads or dangerous goods but 5,000 modules, required to construct new oil sands facilities over the next five years.

The improvements to highway 63 are essential to improve public safety on one of our province's most busy, most dangerous highways. However, when this government first announced its commitment to fast-track highway 63 in October 2012, it also announced \$350 million for improvements to highway 881 and to study requirements to extend that corridor into the oil sands region across the Clearwater River. That commitment appears to have evaporated as government has grappled with declining revenues and flood recovery.

I want to remind the government, however, that capital investment in Wood Buffalo generates outsized economic return that is distributed among all Albertans in tax and royalty revenues. The public return on private investment in public resources, owned by all Albertans, is 2.5 to 1, and that private investment will be better targeted in partnership with the public sector.

This government is correct when it says that not building is not an option, even as it makes difficult choices about where to spend scarce capital, so it would be childish of me to stamp my feet and say, "You promised" without recognizing that my fellow citizens in southern Alberta suffered through a disaster unprecedented in Canadian history this past summer. Still, the municipal sustainability initiative and GreenTRIP funding are not adequate to deliver transportation infrastructure in Wood Buffalo that will help to grow provincial revenues for all Albertans.

So I repeat my statement from Monday. I strongly encourage this government to embrace the innovation it champions and to explore with stakeholders the alternative delivery and finance instruments being proposed within Wood Buffalo to support the design, construction, and maintenance of new transportation infrastructure essential to our continued prosperity, the very same infrastructure identified in government's unfunded Athabasca CRISP document.

One among the new approaches that has been adopted by the province has been the recent land exchange agreement with the RMWB, that essentially makes the municipality the province's banker. The municipality will provide bridge financing to deliver highway improvements within the city of Fort McMurray that will be repaid through the sale of Crown land to private developers. These improvements are essential in a community of 75,000 residents that had only 40 new home lots for sale last year and two neighbourhoods intended to welcome 40,000 new residents, neither of which can proceed until transportation bottlenecks are removed. This land-for-roads agreement indicates the government is willing to explore its options and the exchange or sharing of assets when required to deliver new infrastructure.

It may well be that the government should not pay for every new road that supports resource extraction, but government must be the enabler of a new way of doing business so that the oil sands

producers, railroads, and other private-sector parties can make meaningful contributions to transportation infrastructure.

4:50

I'm confident that the transportation co-ordinating committee will make recommendations to this government about how to best advance essential transportation projects in Wood Buffalo through new governance and financing instruments. I am hopeful that the province will examine these recommendations carefully and determine how it is possible to ensure that oil sands companies meet their socioeconomic obligations in a way that ensures increased revenues, manageable population growth, and appropriate quality-of-life improvements for Wood Buffalo residents.

I'm also pleased to have seen in Budget 2014 that the province has reaffirmed its commitment to completing the Parsons Creek interchange, which will enable residential development in the second of Fort McMurray's two stalled neighbourhoods to resume. It's absurd to think that the fastest growing community in Alberta has been prohibited from welcoming any more than a hundred net new residents for nearly two years because there were no lots available in the entire city on which to build new houses. That impasse has been broken by a willingness to do different, and I hope that the province will bring the same courage, for which the residents of Wood Buffalo have waited, to bear on other issues that will require courage to resolve.

The next phase of the Parsons Creek interchange is to build another crossing across the Athabasca, link that road to the crossing of the Clearwater to the east, and extend that road as the beginning of a link to Peace River to the west. That project, again, will be best completed by bringing creativity and innovation to the table to find solutions to the regional transportation network with all the players in the region.

Fort McMurray has also been well served by commitments from this government to build new schools and to renovate existing schools to accommodate new students arising from a 7 per cent annual population growth. Students speak up to 120 different first languages in Fort McMurray schools, making this northern city one of the most diverse urban areas in Canada. Parents, schoolchildren, and the public and separate school boards are grateful for the commitment of the province in providing suitable school facilities.

My constituents will also appreciate the commitment of funding to address flood impacts and mitigation efforts for our downtown schools, which are the flood plain at the confluence of the Clearwater, Athabasca, Horse, and Hangingstone rivers.

But, speaking of schools, not all is rosy on the education front in Wood Buffalo. When the province removed the mitigation measures in place for the education property tax, it failed to understand something unique about Fort McMurray. The average three-bedroom, single-family home in Fort McMurray is roughly half again as much as the same home would cost in Calgary and twice what it would cost in Edmonton. An ordinary new three-bedroom home lists for just over \$1 million. When the government went to strict market assessment for education property taxes, it imposed a 40 per cent tax hike and again this year on my constituents, hard-working families who already pay more for their housing than anyone else in Canada.

My constituents do not object to paying their fair share, but they do object to the effective doubling of their education property taxes in just over two years, especially those long-term residents on fixed incomes or those who work in the service sector or who otherwise do not work in high-paying, oil sands related jobs.

I've asked in the past that the full market value assessments be phased in over five years, and I ask the government again to

respect the hardship borne by people who already pay more for their housing than anyone else in the country. Two years is too quick; five years would enable folks to manage the transition more favourably.

I said just last Monday that Fort McMurray was one of the two communities identified in August as deserving special consideration to maintain its downtown development in a potential floodway. The throne speech said that the government would make firm the commitment to build community mitigation projects in flood-affected communities. The Wood Buffalo regional council has already introduced measures to protect Fort McMurray that will cost approximately \$160 million in order to comply with the government's 1-in-100-year flood requirements.

Budget 2014 says nothing about flood mitigation for Fort McMurray, and I'm simply putting this government on notice that it should anticipate a firm position from the regional municipality, which is committed to meeting provincially imposed requirements without provincially provided assistance. I am certain that was merely an oversight as the government concentrated its attention on communities that were more drastically affected by June's floods. But given that Fort McMurray and Drumheller alone among provincial towns and cities were recognized as deserving special consideration, it is my expectation that the province will help to defray flood mitigation expenses and not expect the municipality to foot the bill alone.

Government also committed to investing in better seniors' care, focusing on aging-in-place developments. As members of this Assembly are well aware, Fort McMurray has long been advocating, for more than a decade, for its first long-term care facility, the only such facility in a community of 75,000 people, which, if it were available, would free an entire floor of our critical care hospital. I know that Alberta Health, Alberta Infrastructure, and Alberta Municipal Affairs are all in discussion with the regional municipality to bring this vision to fruition using money committed from last year's budget, and this includes not just long-term care but the full spectrum of aging-in-place accommodations for those Albertans who helped to convert the oil sands from Canada's largest research and development project to the engine of its economy and who are now entering the sunset of their lives. I urge this government to bring these negotiations with both the local and federal governments to a rapid close and to break ground on this long-overdue facility in the current calendar year.

Back in 2010 the province took 20 townships from Wood Buffalo and gave them to Lac La Biche as compensation for oil revenues from the Cold Lake air weapons range being captured in the new improvement district that would be awarded primarily to the city of Cold Lake. An \$80 million net solution to a \$10 million problem has been a boon to Cold Lake and Lac La Biche but has left Wood Buffalo with substantial lost revenues. When the proposal was first floated by the province, it was supposed to involve sharing those revenues among all the affected parties. Instead, Wood Buffalo was stripped of up to \$60 million in annual tax revenues, more than \$1 billion over the life of the oil sands projects, in the lands transferred to Lac La Biche, without compensation. The order in council is up for renewal in 2014. At the very least, the government of Alberta needs to re-examine this arrangement and restructure growing revenues so that Wood Buffalo, too, is a beneficiary.

This province has weathered more than one storm since the global economic downturn in 2008. Alberta remains the best place to live, work, learn, and play. That is due in part to our rich natural resources but also to the wisdom of past leaders who built this province. I look forward to working with this government over the

next year to help it understand where it has missed opportunities and how to best correct its oversights so that the wise choices we make today will be recognized by future generations in 20, 30, or a hundred years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Savings Management Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to finally be able to get up to speak to this bill, having had a bit of confusion around stuff and not being able to speak to it prior to now. I will as part of it talk a little bit about the amendments that we had hoped to bring to this bill in an effort to make it slightly more palatable.

Bill 1, you know, appears to be what the government thinks is a flagship bill to begin this latest session, and to that extent I think it's really a rather disappointing outing and represents a disappointing foray into defining the future direction of the government. It represents a transfer of money from the heritage trust fund into a number of different accounts that may or may not be spent. We can't really tell because there's very, very little direction about what is going to come from this bill.

There are a couple of critical areas that I'm very concerned about. The first one – I'll just touch on it briefly – is the plan to create this Alberta future fund, so \$200 million just this year and then another \$200 million every year till 2024. Now, I realize that these guys have been in government for a long time, and when you look at the cost of their expenses and the fact that they've been here for 45 years, I suppose it makes sense at a certain point that they stop getting how much this money is actually worth. But this idea of putting aside \$200 million a year for a fund so we can, quote, maybe do something cool, end quote, in the future – and that was a direct quote from the Deputy Premier – is really a little outrageous, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

The Finance minister said previously, in introducing this bill in third reading, that Albertans want to know what we're saving for, but you know, I just really think that \$200 million a year for the next 10 years for, quote, something really cool, end quote, doesn't actually meet that standard, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that it's going to give Albertans great comfort. Moreover, given the inability of members of this government to distinguish between their public duty and obligations and their political duties and obligations and, in particular, the ongoing mixture of their political expenses with their governance expenses, I am deeply concerned that what this fund really is is an election slush fund. It's an election slush fund that's being used with a historic and iconic savings account that almost all Albertans have grown to respect.

You know, I don't want to spend a lot of time on it, but another resource-driven country in the world, that's been producing oil

and gas for about half the time that we have, has something like 25 times the amount of money in their savings fund as a result of their much more intentional management of their natural resources, understanding that that management is to be done for the best interests of their citizens rather than for the best interests of those developing the oil and gas resources. So it's always been the case that you look at the heritage trust fund and it's quite disappointing in terms of how small it is relative to how big it could be, but now we see that we're going to skim money off it to create cute little election slush funds, and that is worrisome.

The other item that I want to spend a little bit more time talking about, though, of course, is the social endowment fund. Now, I will say that the idea of setting aside the fund to the extent that parts of it can be used to support research into best practices and to support research into design and implementation of innovative interventions is good stuff, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a problem with that, and I know that many people within the postsecondary sector have advocated for this as a means to increase the quality and the research opportunities for people in the arts sector as a whole in our postsecondary institutions. To the extent that this money ends up going to that, that's a good thing. I, of course, am tremendously skeptical that the money will go to that because, you know, I don't know that these guys feel anything is worthwhile unless there is some oil company at the end of the financial trail receiving a cheque. I would really want to see that part of it overseen with much more caution and rigour.

The other piece of it that I am deeply concerned about is this notion of social impact bonds, and as the critic for Human Services I really, really believe that we need to have a much more intelligent conversation about this ridiculous strategy. Now, the Finance minister at one point said: oh, well, don't worry about it; it's not like these social impact bonds will be instead of our current funding; we're going to maintain our current funding. But I think the starting point, Mr. Speaker, is that our current funding is grossly, grossly inadequate. Let's just start there. We don't have enough funding. The problem now is that as advocates, people who want to build this province and build opportunity in this province and reduce inequality in this province and expand the quality of life for all Albertans, push for more investment into the kinds of programs that will achieve that object, this government is going to say: "Oh, no. Well, we have our social impact bonds, and we're paying business a premium of 10 to 20 per cent for them to invest in so-called innovative practices."

You know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this is just an incredibly unproven strategy with almost no record of success anywhere. What we do know is that it transfers money from the public sector to the private sector and that it rewards the private sector for investing in social problems that this government has failed to invest in adequately to eliminate. That is what we do know.

There is almost no successful example of a social impact bond anywhere else in the world, and there are a number of different reasons for this, Mr. Speaker. Partly, what we're doing is that we are increasing the administrative costs, and we are increasing the complexity, and we are increasing the administrative burden on the very nonprofit organizations that are theoretically trying to achieve these objects. That's the first thing we're doing. We are injecting inefficiency into the provision of social services and social development strategies within our province. So that's the first thing that we're going to do. We're injecting cost into it because we are going to fracture it and have an increasingly patchwork system, and in so doing, of course, we're going to once again reduce efficiency and increase cost.

We are also undermining the quality of the work that will be achieved by ensuring that the object is not actually the best interests of the people receiving the benefits of these programs. The object will be the best interests of the investors. In doing that, we also ensure that we've injected another criterion, another standard, another process which will reduce the effectiveness and the efficiency and the outcome in this overall sector, and let me tell you that this is a sector that desperately needs attention because inequality is growing daily in this province. These guys like to think: oh, yeah, it's growing daily because our rich friends are getting richer. You know what? That's not exactly it. The purchasing power and the actual economic quality of life of regular Albertans is decreasing as well as time marches on.

For the social impact bonds we've got some really kind of scary examples. We've got the New York City Rikers Island social impact bond, where Goldman Sachs invested in a project. As it turned out, the nonprofit itself had to guarantee \$7.2 million of that \$9.6 million, and then if the project actually works, the government is going to give them a 20 per cent return. Why are we paying a 20 per cent premium, or why would we even consider that that was a good idea? It just makes no sense across the board.

I'm overwhelmed by the absurdity of this particular policy choice that these guys are embarking upon, and it really reveals that, you know, it's all about giving money to friends and insiders. It's just: let's find another way to give money to friends and insiders. Let's make sure that there's an opportunity to maximize profiteering on the backs of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens.

Now, there is this notion that: "Oh, well, you know, if we bring the private sector in there, they're the really super innovative ones. Woo-hoo. They're innovative and the government is not innovative." Well, you know what? If you look at the history of social development programs over the years, the innovation actually comes from publicly funded universities, it comes from the public sector, and it comes from nonprofits. There's no history of innovation from the private sector in this area, none at all. Again, it's not evidence based. Those folks over there are constantly accusing us of being ideological. This is one of the most ideologically driven, idiotic initiatives that I have seen come from that side in a long, long time, and it's not going to make things better for the very Albertans that need it most.

Now, will it generate innovation? Well, here's the other thing. Investors are not stupid. They're not going to invest in high-risk stuff. No. They're going to cream the easy stuff off the top. You know what? It doesn't take Goldman Sachs to tell us that if you provide counselling and mentoring and job search assistance to somebody coming out of prison, they're less likely to reoffend. Okay? You don't need Goldman Sachs to tell you that that's going to happen, because the research is out there. What you need to do is just as efficiently as possible provide that service. Why would you then ask Goldman Sachs to do it and give them a 20 per cent return on it? It's just the most silly thing that I've ever heard of.

5:10

Then what's going to end up happening is that you're going to fracture things. You're going to carve off the easy stuff that we all know is easy to do – and the only reason it's not happening more is because these guys have slashed funding – and then you're going to leave the really tough stuff in the public system. Then the public system itself is going to be fractured away from these other services, and they're not going to have flexibility to devote the resources that are necessary, so the really challenging groups of people are going to grow and grow and develop and become a bigger cost.

Anyone who has ever done any work on this topic concludes that it is not a good idea. Interestingly, I think it was Hawaii that actually passed legislation to prohibit social impact bonds. They said: “You know what? We’ve done the research, and this is just too uncertain. It’s not a good deal for anybody, and we’re just not going to go there.” Apparently, these folks haven’t done that.

We planned to bring in two different amendments, Mr. Speaker. One of them would have replaced one of the recitals in the beginning of the act. What we would have done is that we would have replaced one of the recitals with a different one that says: whereas Albertans recognize that innovative social services originate from government initiatives, nonprofit organizations, and publicly funded research rather than a motivation for private profit.

Mr. Wilson: It’s the Savings Management Act.

Ms Notley: I know it’s the Savings Management Act. I’m just looking for the actual copy of the act so that I can identify the recital that we would have replaced.

What it currently says is, “Whereas these opportunities should build on the existing innovation system to support new ideas, risk-sharing and creative collaboration across sectors.” We were going to replace that with what I just recited. We were going to do that in order to make it clear that that’s where our limited resources should be going in order to get the greatest outcome.

The other thing that we were going to do was that we were going to strike out section 2(1)(a)(iii). That section of the act outlines that one of the purposes of this particular endowment was to develop new funding models and partnerships. That was one of the purposes of the social innovation endowment. You know what? We were just going to strike that out because we don’t need to waste time finding ways to give McDonald’s or Walmart, of all people, an opportunity to invest in and make money off poverty. It just makes no sense. We thought that that was something we should just ensure couldn’t possibly happen.

If we could have gotten members of this Legislature to agree to that, then we might have been able to provide a great deal more support to the objects of this social endowment fund, but as long as we’re looking at taking heritage trust fund money, which, as I said before, is an iconic savings plan, which Albertans over the years have contributed to through their tax dollars and through forgoing other public services and all those other things, as long as we’re planning on taking that money and using it to find ways to invite Walmart and McDonald’s and anyone else to the table so they can make money off high-risk youth and poor families and those kinds of people, then we can’t support it, so it needs to be removed. Those were the two amendments that we were planning on bringing forward yesterday had the matter carried on into the evening as we had expected it would.

Meanwhile, just sort of going back into a little bit more detail, one of the few examples of a social impact bond that’s actually been implemented, which had sort of limited success, was the Peterborough, U.K., prison project. One of the reviews of that project afterwards concluded that the process was “time-consuming and analytically complex.”

In addition, what has also been identified, as I said before, is that these nonprofits end up having to hire people to act as fundraisers and salespeople. So they can start running around to all these businesses saying: “Hey, we’ve got a quick way for you to make 10 or 15 per cent on your investment. We’ve found some really keen kids who just happened to get in trouble with the law, but they’ve all agreed to volunteer in this program, and we’re pretty sure they’re not going to reoffend. So, hey, why don’t you give us money for that, and once you do, eventually the govern-

ment is going to give you back that money plus 10 or 20 per cent out of the heritage trust fund.” What a great plan.

But how much money have we actually saved? Well, probably none. What we’ve done is that we’ve just lost that money, and we’ve given McDonald’s or Walmart the opportunity to make money. Meanwhile, instead of actually working on the programs that would bring about the reduction in poverty or high-risk behaviour or whatever it is that you’re working on, the nonprofit organization has hired somebody who does that job, who does the pitching, who’s the salesman, who’s the used car dealer running out there trying to pitch these programs to funders. That’s what they’re spending their time doing. Then they have to go out and hire legal counsel and financial advisers to assist them with the management of their bonds. Then after that the government itself has to regulate these organizations that are making these offers to investors because if they don’t, they’ll probably be found liable for any loss of investment dollars. So it really makes no sense.

I think, ultimately, though, what is probably the most compelling piece of this is the position taken by the Alberta College of Social Workers, which is simply that it is immoral for people to be making money off human suffering. Human suffering should not be turned into a commodity, and that’s what social impact bonds do. We don’t think anyone should be allowed to profit from the misery of others, and we certainly don’t think that anyone should be allowed to profit by skimming the somewhat easy problems to solve off the process and then subsequently leaving the challenging problems with fewer resources and less capacity to fix the problem. Just like this government wants Syncrude in our classrooms – because we all know our five-year-olds are there looking for a job right now – this is a continuation of the same approach.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: I move to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (continued)

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments or questions to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: I’m just pulling my thoughts together here, Mr. Chair, but thank you for the opportunity. I’ll keep this fairly brief. This is the interim supply, right?

My comments really, again, speak to the fund allocations and how this budget is continuing on the narrative of the tale of two Albertas, where there are rules and dollars for some Albertans, which, ironically, turn out to be mostly the supporters of the current government. Then, you know, there’s reality for those that aren’t, the rest of Albertans, including and especially those that are squeezed, I would argue, in the middle and even in the lower socioeconomic bracket.

I think what’s important to point out for myself, Mr. Chairman, and on behalf of, I think, many Albertans is that this current government is out of touch with the priorities of Albertans. One

need look no further than the fact that our Education budget barely accounts for the increase in student enrolment, yet still, you know, school boards, classrooms, teachers, and principals around the province are calling out for more dollars to be able to lower class sizes, to bring in necessary resources, whether it's staff training to be able to accommodate today's classroom and its makeup.

You know, from that to postsecondary, still reeling from the cuts from last year's budget, to the fact that we've got an increasing number of seniors that are waiting for long-term care facilities, for beds – that backlogs our health system because there is a shortage. They're tying up beds that are much needed in our hospitals. You know, Mr. Chair, that's really just the tip of the iceberg as far as where we're at.

I think, you know, that the message really comes back to the fact that this PC government refuses to look at the other side of the coin when we're talking budgets, and that, of course, is looking at revenue. I can appreciate Alberta being a very competitive jurisdiction, whether we're talking about royalties or taxes, but what I do find frustrating – and most Albertans understand – is that there's quite a bit of room between where we currently are and where we could go and still remain the most competitive jurisdiction but bring in billions of dollars into our revenue, additionally, to ensure that our classrooms are supported, our health care is supported, supported above and beyond just the capital or the facilities. Of course, as I pointed out numerous times, this government loves to open up shiny new buildings and then walk away when it comes to the operational side or ensuring that there are staff to operate it or, in the example of schools, ensuring that there are enough staff in our schools to deliver the high-quality education that Albertans have come to expect. I would argue that our front-line staff are doing a phenomenal job, but there's no wonder why many of them are overworked, are being, you know, pushed out of the system. It's simply becoming unbearable.

I would like to have seen, again, this government address the revenue side of the budget coin. There are some real, concrete solutions that would ensure that we have dollars not just for today but for tomorrow, that we'd be able to grow our heritage savings fund at a much greater pace as compared to many other jurisdictions and, obviously, invest in infrastructure, which is sorely overdue for maintenance. You know, we need look no further than the fact that – four decades of the same government in power, and they've starved our infrastructure to the point where much of it is crumbling. We don't even know the integrity of some of our buildings province-wide. It would have been much wiser to invest over the last 20 years in our infrastructure as opposed to the predicament we're now in. Look no further than the condition of the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton or other hospitals province-wide that need a complete overhaul.

You know, Mr. Chair, there are lots of solutions, available solutions, again, of addressing moving our personal income tax to a progressive system, which would generate more dollars. Again, it needs to be reiterated that it would save our middle-income earners, our middle-income households dollars. I know the leader of the Alberta NDP, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, has repeatedly given figures on household incomes that are around \$100,000, \$120,000 and how much more taxes that household pays in Alberta under the flat tax versus living in provinces like B.C. or Ontario, where there are progressive income tax systems but where they would actually pay less in taxes and save more money.

Looking at, again, our corporate income tax rate, where corporations are taxed on their profits, not if they're, you know, a

fledging business that is at a loss, unnecessarily dropping – years ago this government dropped it from 15 to 10. This is ideology, Mr. Chair. If, in fact, Alberta was tied for the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada, which we are, if that was the sole driver of where companies set up shop, then, really, the rest of the provinces minus one other province shouldn't have any industry or corporations operating inside of their boundaries. But the reality is that they do, and they pay higher taxes than other provinces. They're still there. They're not running for the hills. Again, it adds more dollars to the revenue.

Really, at the end of the day, Mr. Chair, we're talking about ensuring that there is stable, predictable funding for infrastructure, for the priorities that Albertans have expressed. I can tell you that as long as we continue to heavily rely on our revenue from oil and gas, because it fluctuates so much in the market, it seems absurd to bet on a roller coaster – one year you're doing well, and the next year you're not – and really break that down into month by month as opposed to stable, predictable funding. School boards have been asking for it in schools. Our health care system is looking for it. Municipalities are dying to have stable, predictable funding to be able to manage their plans and their growth. Again, I think that this is another example of an opportunity missed.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my views.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 4 Estate Administration Act

The Chair: Are there questions or comments to be offered?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Chair, I'd like to rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

5:30

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 5 and Bill 4.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Having heard the report from the hon. Member for Calgary-East, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Due to the agreement between the House leaders I'd like to request unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 64(2) to proceed to third reading of Bill 5.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn the House till 7:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:32 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 12, 2014

Issue 8e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Donna Kennedy-Glans	Associate Minister – Electricity and Renewable Energy
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Ric McIver	Minister of Infrastructure
Diana McQueen	Minister of Energy
Frank Oberle	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dave Quest	Associate Minister – Seniors
Dave Rodney	Associate Minister – Wellness
Donald Scott	Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation
Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Khan
Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Fenske	Young
Hehr	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 12, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Savings Management Act

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Campbell]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is my second opportunity to speak to this bill, which continues to raise more questions than it answers. For a government in such financial difficulty the first question, of course, that it raises is: why are they downloading financial responsibilities for social programs onto the private sector? Well, the answer is too clear. This has come up at this time in our history when in spite of tremendous revenue from our oil resources, our gas resources, our gambling revenues this government is now going to try something out of the pages of other countries' books, many of which not only fail to provide the necessary human services, that they're designed to do, but in some cases show harmful effects because they are inadequately supervised, inadequately evaluated, and obviously the conflict of interest between profit and people becomes too onerous to deal with.

It's clear to many of us on this side of the House that a government that doesn't plan for the long term, that doesn't manage its finances in a stable and responsible way is destined for a crash, and not only will it bring down its own success in the future, electoral success; it will bring down tremendous suffering on the people. If this extends into, for example, paid monitors of the environment, this too will suffer.

There are examples, as I have indicated earlier, in the nonprofit sector where private funds and philanthropic funds have enabled nonprofits such as the YWCA and Women in Need and the Vecova society in Calgary to develop some entrepreneurial sidelines, for example fitness facilities and technology, that in the case of women in need help them to market some of their donations to many people in the city, that allow them to have more resources to work with women in need and their families.

The devil is in the details, I should say, Mr. Speaker. Just as in the case of P3s, where we see in some instances that there may have been some benefit to the public in private-public partnerships, there is a tremendous temptation and, if there is no due diligence on the part of government in negotiating these P3s, a tremendous opportunity for misuse of public funds for private purposes and a failure to achieve the ends that were in fact designed to be achieved. There are a number of publications out showing that there have been more failures in P3s, for example. The devil is in the details. If we don't do our diligence in setting up these contracts, if we don't allow members of this Legislature to see the contracts, if we don't allow public scrutiny, it opens the door to, again, a real loss of public interest and a loss of public trust, and the whole political process comes into disrepute.

While there may be some interesting opportunities in agriculture for the kind of innovations and new technology that's been at least mused about in Bill 1 and there may be some opportunities in some other technology, that we could see benefit the long-term interests of Albertans, the real questions revolve around whether this government is competent to manage these in a way that would ensure that the public interest in served for the long term. For many of us that's a real stretch after seeing the way we have managed some of our contracts. One that comes to mind, of course, is the Health Resource Centre in the Grace hospital in Calgary, that went bankrupt under this kind of privatization and public-private partnership that was attempted but without the competence to deal with it in a sustainable and responsible way.

There's no question in my mind that we have to look at all creative options. We have to examine the contribution that the private sector can make in public services and research and innovation. We do not have to sell out the public interest in that context. In fact, Albertans are looking to us to be very careful, critical, thoughtful stewards of the public interest and ensure that not only do we get the best value for the public dollars but that if private interests and philanthropy are moving into the areas of our human services, where our most vulnerable are – and I'm thinking in terms of the homeless initiatives that are being talked about, psychological services, mental health issues, even some of the community outreach and recreation opportunities – we are fastidious about ensuring that we allow the individuals themselves to play a big role in setting the outcomes, the goals of these particular activities and in no way assume that the measurements that are being taken of these particular activities necessarily reflect the reality on the ground.

That's a big question for many of these evaluations and outcome measures. Who's measuring, and how valid are the measures? Do they reflect the outcomes and goals of the individuals involved in these particular services? It's so clear that professionals and organizations, first and foremost, naturally see their own interests, and those interests get reflected in the goal-setting and the measurements and the reporting. Unfortunately, there needs to be, if we're going to go down this route, some independent monitoring of what's happening with these funds, what's happening with the programs, and the extent to which they're actually doing what they say that they're doing.

While these are attempts by this government to look like they're innovative – they're trying new things. They're combining, hopefully, responsible private investment donations and looking for a public good. There may be some cases where that is the case, but this is fraught with peril. I think that, especially in a government that has so clearly mismanaged our long-term public interest and our resources, it's fraught with distrust by many, and this government is going to have a real challenge to convince Albertans as well as, I think, the professionals who work in the field that these investments are going to result in improvements.

It doesn't sound like there's a lot of interest in this debate across the floor. There's lots else to talk about, I guess. Perhaps it's *House of Cards* that's being talked about actively over there and some of the dark side of politics, but I don't see anybody ready to jump up and challenge me on anything that I've said, so I have to assume . . .

Mr. Eggen: I think it's *Game of Thrones* more likely.

Dr. Swann: Or a game of thrones that they're involved with.

I have to assume that they're either agreeing with everything I say, or what is more apparent is that they have other interests. Bill 1, their primary bill, their bill that is supposed to be so important

that the Premier makes it number one, is clearly not of that much interest on the other side and of not much enthusiasm.

So I'll take my seat and recognize that we will not be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to just make a few more comments in regard to Bill 1 here this evening. Yesterday I was talking about my issue and problems around the social impact bonds, but this evening I would like to point out other issues that I think are deficient in this bill. You know, it's this whole idea of funding for social programs, right? Again, with the Alberta New Democrats, our issue is not that we don't give social services proper funding models; it's that the government underfunds them or doesn't fund them, period. This whole idea of endowments and so forth is a very, I would say, primitive way to actually move forward on financing essential government services, for which this government is responsible.

7:40

Many of our social programs currently can point directly to things that have been proven to save the government money down the road – right? – but in fact this PC government refuses to invest in them. Using schools as community hubs is a good example of this, a program that remains unfunded this year but was able to point to savings of more than \$4 per dollar invested by increasing high school graduation rates and improving employment opportunities for parents through increased social programming.

My question is why this government feels the need to step outside our publicly funded model into something that will actually cost us more and pay investors a profit that's to be taken from our social programs. There's simply no need when we already have so many underfunded social services at present. If, you know, we were to simply try to cut this bill, I think it doesn't even float then, so really it's just a nonstarter.

As I said before, the social impact bond issue just does not provide innovative social services; government investment in social programs and university research is what actually does. Somehow, this is some strange thing, a growth, I could say, an appendage on core social programs, and I just don't think it's an experiment that we have the luxury to afford ourselves here, at this juncture or really any juncture, Mr. Speaker.

I find it strange because, you know, this government does not have to have an aversion to risk. We can take measured risk and progressively step forward, and we do have room to do so, right? When we do feel risk averse, like an investor we can play it safe and invest in many proven social programs, that this government has left gaps in. Simply put, there's no need to look to the private sector for this kind of innovation in social services because this model that's been put forward in Bill 1 just isn't there.

We see some sort of odd, as I say, obtuse sort of experiments in places like New York City, with jails, and, you know, in England and so forth. In other places, like Massachusetts, it was firmly rejected. The innovative social programs that they talk about, like counselling for inmates and so forth – I mean, this whole idea of investing in those things just doesn't seem logical. It seems vaguely distasteful as well, Mr. Speaker. We don't need to go that way. I know there are people that are actively lobbying for this kind of thing, this kind of structure – maybe that's what was going on tonight; I don't know – but ultimately I don't think that

Albertans really need this framework that would suggest that social impact bonds could come forward and be anything useful.

There are so many questions around this, right? You know, how can we be sure that the funds will be paid out appropriately and that endowments aren't just some sort of subsidy in some way? It seems as though we've created this Bill 1 as a way to talk about things that need to be invested and talk about spending public money for essential services but without necessarily having to do anything because it's contingent on the heritage trust fund. The whole idea of sort of mixing in the heritage trust fund with this, again, I find not only vaguely illogical but not a little bit distasteful as well.

Why can't government, as I said, just fund these ministries and programs – right? – in the first place so that we don't have to rely on endowment funds and layers of bureaucracy coming from different sources? I mean, this whole idea of endowments has this taste of, you know, Yale or Harvard or something like that, where you put this money away and might bestow it on the poor or something like that. It has this kind of a feel that just doesn't belong here, really. It obfuscates the fact that this is public money anyway. This is not like something that we store away and, you know, maybe save up in some secret little fund to build something cool or whatever that quote was. Again, just way out there. In fact, this is public money, right? And the public expects that we pay for these social services and we pay for public education. Yes, we pay for social innovation, too, but we don't need someone to bet on it through the stock market, to see how it's going to go and then pay out a 10 per cent return on it. I mean, it's not like we're playing the horses here. These are human beings.

Again, the difficulty in finding people that actually are willing to bid on P3s, I think, is an indicator of the market right now and the changing view on these things, that they're not such a great investment anyway, right? You know, the P3 model only makes sense – and I could extend it to the social impact bond endowment sort of scheme – if you are transferring risk over to the investor, I guess. I mean, I don't really like it anyway, but if you're not transferring that risk over, then it's even more illogical and even more nonsensical. It's the same if you don't have multiple bidders for something. If you run a P3 or a social impact bond or whatever and it's just one person, then, in fact, it turns it upside down and becomes a negative, really. That's what we're seeing here with the sort of bumpy ride that P3s have been getting in the investment world over these last few months.

Again, for all of these reasons I certainly don't see the point here. I mean, it'd be nice to have a flagship bill that perhaps is a bit more inspiring instead of, number one, sort of confusing and, number two, just sort of diverting the obvious debate, which is for us to ensure that we provide the best delivery of public services to ensure the maximum return and benefit for the safety and security and health and edification of all Albertans. That's what our job is here, and I don't see that Bill 1 really fits into that ultimate purpose for us here at the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'd be interested to hear the member's opinion of this use of the heritage fund and how it does or does not serve the long-term interests of our children.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. You know, we all watch with interest the heritage trust fund. In fact, I'm on the committee that oversees part of the heritage trust fund. It's been sort of sitting there dormant and

stagnant for so many years. I think that we've used some of the money there over the years. In the initial conception and execution of the heritage trust fund I think it had a real, tangible value, right? We helped to invest in structures and in programs and science and grain cars and so forth that, really, not only helped the diversification of our economy but had demonstrable results for Albertans to see.

This idea now of somehow tying the, I guess, expenditure parts of the heritage fund through an endowment program, again, just confuses. If you try to follow the money or follow the logic and then the execution of that money, you know, it just seems to make it that much more convoluted – right? – hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain. I just really don't see that. You know, I think that with our capacity to not use renewable resources to pay for operations of this government but, rather, to build a royalty structure and a corporate tax structure and a personal tax structure that are in keeping with the rest of the modern industrialized world, then you put the money into that heritage trust fund, and you can just leave it there for longer terms. You can get interest off that and use that.

You know, it's the principle. I'm thinking of other trust funds around the world where they just leave the money there. It's serving the double duty of stabilizing the economy, making it bulletproof to the vagaries of the energy market from whence it came, but you're also stabilizing your economy, right? If the Norwegians didn't put all of those billions of dollars to one side, then they would be at risk of distorting and making the diversity of their economy less possible.

I mean, a good heritage fund serves a lot of purposes, and building this gateway to the money to access that heritage fund, I think, is irresponsible. Thank you.

7:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Horner: Yeah. I just wanted to ask the hon. member – he has obviously got a dislike for endowments – whether he thought that the Alberta heritage trust fund for medical research had served any useful purpose at all over the last number of years and whether or not that endowment should ever have happened, I guess.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks for that. Certainly, it's been a useful enterprise, right? But, I think that, you know, it's not necessarily a model by which we can have a successful extension of that to these other areas. I think that, as I say, when you make an investment through the heritage trust fund, you seek to find places to make investments in medical research, as you say, or actual physical structure or infrastructure or so forth. You don't necessarily have to tie a limit or paint a fence around that. Those are choices we can make here in the Legislature or choices that you can make as a government.

You know, the endowment model, let's say, with medical research over time – certainly, the idea of investing in medical research has been most useful, and certainly we've created good programs around that, but the physical structure of disseminating that money, I think, is not necessarily best represented or executed through endowments. That's my feeling on that. I mean, let's face it. I think everyone here would like to make sure that we do save for the future more and have ways by which we can make longer term investments. I'm just not so excited about the idea of using the endowments to do so.

I mean, it's not a question of how you spend on that thing, like when you're talking about medical investment or, let's say, social services or rehabilitation of prisoners. Those are all obvious things

which we should be responsible for, but it's the physical structure of how we do fund those, whether we use endowments or not, that I find less than . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to close debate on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I rose on 29(2)(a) to ask the hon. member about the heritage trust fund for medical research because, you know, I was going through a lot of *Hansard* records from 1976, Premier Lougheed, actually, when the heritage savings trust fund was established and again later when the Alberta heritage trust fund for medical research was established by Premier Lougheed as well. He is also the one that was responsible for establishing, as I understand it, the Alberta heritage scholarship fund.

You know, Premier Klein was the one that did the ingenuity fund. We called it the ingenuity fund, but it was the engineering and science research development fund. In fact, Premier Klein was the one that did the access to the future fund, Mr. Speaker.

These are all endowments that were created so that the money could be set aside and the principal held so that the endowment could kick out a stable amount of money every year for the specific purpose of research, of scholarships for our young people. I heard the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education the other day talking about how Alberta has more scholarships and bursaries for their students than any other province, as I understand it. That's made possible because we have an endowment, Mr. Speaker.

You know, when you think about the \$86 million a year that is kicked out from the heritage savings trust fund for medical research, Edmonton has benefited from that fund in a huge way when you look at the University of Alberta, when you look at MacEwan. Calgary has benefited from that in a huge way, Mr. Speaker. The medical devices that are being developed at the U of C, the virology institute and the research that's being done over at the U of A: much of that has been possible because of a stable funding flow from an endowment not subject to the operational ups and downs of the operating budgets of the government.

Premier Lougheed recognized that Albertans wanted to set money aside, but he also recognized that they wanted it to work for them. Premier Klein knew that Albertans wanted us to continue to set money aside. But he, too, also recognized that it should work for them and it should do things that were directed for the future value of Albertans together.

I guess that the hon. members who spoke this evening opposed to the endowments would have voted against endowments back then, too, and that would have been a shame, Mr. Speaker. It would have been a shame to lose that type of forward-thinking vision, and that's what Bill 1 is all about. It's a forward-thinking, visionary bill that sets up three new endowments being created within the heritage savings trust fund as well as the augmentation of the heritage scholarship fund to support the trades. I mean, we hear this every day. We need to have more support for the trades through scholarships as well as stable long-term sources of funding for strategic investments to help complex social problems. They don't have to be social impact bonds. It could be a whole raft of other things.

I'll tell you, the not-for-profit sector is quite excited about this, Mr. Speaker. They're excited to see where this is going to go and what it could possibly be doing. In the coming months Human Services officials are going to be working with stakeholders and

leaders in the field of social innovation to identify those priority areas and the projects with the most potential as well as developing a governance structure, application procedures, eligibility criteria, et cetera, for the new endowments. They're excited about what could be, not concerned about what might not be. They're excited about the future of this province, and we all should be here, too. This is what Bill 1 is all about.

There's been some concern expressed about: my God, you're putting money aside, but now you're spending it all. That's just patently untrue. The total value of Alberta's major savings accounts is projected to grow by almost \$3 billion over the next three years, to \$26 billion by the end of this current three-year fiscal plan. In the final year, when these three endowments are really cooking, \$54 million would be transferred out of the heritage fund in respect to those new endowments. Fifty-four million, Mr. Speaker. By comparison, the heritage fund is expected to generate \$1.3 billion in that year. That's \$1.3 billion. The \$54 million transfer represents only about 4 per cent of the heritage fund's projected net investment income in 2016-17.

So we're balancing what Albertans told us: yes, you've got to save for the future and you've got to set it aside and it can't be touched, portions of it, and you have to tell us what you're saving it for. Make it work for us. Make it be something that people in the future will go, "That was a very, very wise thing to do," just as we can stand here today and we can say that Premier Lougheed did a very wise thing when he established the heritage fund for medical research, when he established the scholarship fund; just as we can stand here today and we can say that Premier Klein did a very wise thing when he established the access to the future fund, when he established what we now call the ingenuity fund, because they were for the future of this province, Mr. Speaker; just as we can say today and they will say 10 years from now that the Premier in 2014 did a very wise thing with Bill 1. That's why we should support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been called for Bill 2.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

8:00

Bill 3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: Is there a speaker? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say a couple of words in regard to Bill 3. This seems to be a means by which to modernize and streamline the security laws for these over-the-counter derivatives, known as OTCs, and to harmonize derivatives in general. I guess one of the issues that this brings to mind for me

is just, I think, the importance of us looking for a national regulator for these things and to work with. There is a co-operative framework going in with B.C. and Ontario and the federal government. You know, it just really illustrates the desire and the need to have a national regulator.

I know that we've resisted that here in Alberta in the past, but every time one of these things comes up, the need to regulate derivatives and so forth, we're ultimately going to just be kind of duplicating something that's happening elsewhere anyway, right? The larger benefits of having a national regulator in Alberta participating in the national regulatory system I think just far outweigh any reason that seems to come up every so often here why we resist that. You know, we are one of the leading sort of engines of our national economy here, too, so we have an increasing responsibility on that national stage to set standards and participate in these sorts of things, so it would be nice if we might consider that in the future. I always will bring it up every time this kind of thing is coming forward.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone that wishes to speak who hasn't spoken before? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and respond formally to the Speech from the Throne His Honour presented last week. It's important that Albertans hear from the Premier and the government in the new year and understand that this sets the tone for the legislative session and potentially the year of activity in the Legislature but also reflects on, hopefully, beyond that year into the distant future. It should entail a clear vision, a sense of values and principles. It should engender enthusiasm and inspiration in the members here seated, and in the population it should set out some concrete goals and steps in getting toward and achieving that vision. Finally, Mr. Speaker, it should be consistent with the past year or two in office and recognize what has been accomplished and what is yet to be accomplished.

Unfortunately, this speech did none of those things, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think it achieved any level of trust with the Legislature. The faces of the government clearly showed very little enthusiasm, very little inspiration around this speech. There wasn't nearly the exuberance that we've heard in the past, and

there was a real sense of déjà vu and I would say ennui, or boredom, in much of the rehashed platitudes.

Again, the throne speech really lacked a sense of foresight, a clear look into the future and some of the challenges we're facing in this country and in this world and a willingness to embrace it with humility; the tremendous need for a trust-building engagement process that would be credible and really show an adaptive leadership that is recognizing the new evidence that is before us; longer term investments in people, in the environment, in energy, and a recognition that people within government as well as in our society are demoralized – they're anxious. They see real problems ahead with a government that has continued to have a fairly monolithic view of what this province is all about as a resource-based economy and doesn't yet see the longer term implications of this gross dependency on one product, one resource.

"Adaptive management" is a term that I have learned, and it's used increasingly to distinguish short-term economic focus from longer term global horizons of caring and responsibility. Programs called Leadership Calgary and Leadership Edmonton may be familiar to people. Ken Low initiated it in Calgary, and he has had a tremendous impact on hundreds of young professionals who are seriously interested in looking at the roots of error and ignorance and waste and identifying within themselves and within their culture some of the conditioning that has resulted in poor long-term planning, limited commitment to evidence, and a lack of real foresight and self-critical diligence in planning for a wiser use of resources and capacity building in our population.

Albertans, especially young people, are rightly concerned where this 43-year-old government is going with respect to their future. Where is any indication of a sustainable economy, a diverse and responsible energy future, and an environment that is so prized that it will be independently and scientifically monitored at the highest standards and enforced with rigour and real consequences? More and more of our population, especially young people, recognize that the debts are mounting in this province. Especially the young people are going to be paying those debts in the future, not only in real-dollar terms, where their education and cost of living is acutely being felt, but that there are going to be significantly increased resources needed for seniors' care and new Canadians and the challenges that our environmental liabilities increasingly are going to put upon future generations.

And what of climate change, Mr. Speaker? Nary a mention. The largest challenge facing this generation and perhaps the largest challenge facing the planet in our history, it got no mention at all. What does this mean? It's like we're living in a bubble here in Alberta and dragged into the 21st century only reluctantly, with scientists almost to a man and a woman saying: take this issue seriously. This is not only going to affect us; it is going to affect the most vulnerable around the world, and our children are going to pay a huge price by ignoring this most fundamental threat to survival.

Instead, we see a government countering any criticism of our fossil fuel obsession with more strident and more costly communications. How can people, especially our young people, have trust in a government that still doesn't acknowledge that our groundwater has been contaminated by the oil and gas industry? Not a single water well in this province has the department of environment acknowledged as contaminated by the oil and gas industry.

8:10

What does this say about a government that says that it's acting in the public interest and wants and believes in the best of science and evidence? It's an abomination, Mr. Speaker, and it speaks to a

very fearful and duplicitous government that does not want to know the truth about what we've been doing in the last hundred years in this province with over 300,000 wells.

Climate change gets mentioned in the same sentence as our pathetic carbon levy, which amounts to about \$2.50 a tonne, really, as an intensity target based on a company reducing its emissions per barrel by 12 per cent, not on reducing absolute emissions. Yet the environment minister continues to argue, as she did over the past four years, that we are making progress on carbon reductions.

Another area of loss of trust is in our markets, Mr. Speaker, and that's speaking loudly to this government, if they're willing to hear, about a world that's embracing alternatives and energy conservation and renewable energy alternatives in a serious way. There's not only an economic boon but also a moral commitment to a better future on the planet.

Trust is a reason to vote for a government, and trust will be the reason why Albertans get actively involved in the next election and throw out this tired old government: distrust over wasteful spending, shocking salaries and severances, and the growing inequality of our people, especially our aboriginal people, who continue to be marginalized, neglected, and, unfortunately, continue to be abused and discriminated against in a society that has not yet embraced the reconciliation and real openness of a caring and responsible society.

They continue to languish in squalid conditions, in limbo between federal and provincial jurisdictions, as I heard from the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples last night in their very moving presentations around off-reserve First Nations people struggling to get their lives together in our cities and towns, doubly wounded by the failure of our human services to learn and work from a cultural sensitivity perspective around the deep wounds in a people that have been only nominally consulted as their lands and their livelihoods flee to large development interests and short-term financial gain.

We are blessed with tremendous renewable energy assets and yet continue to increasingly flare gases into the atmosphere and allow countless numbers of old and even newer oil and gas wells to leak methane into our environment, adding to our tremendous carbon emissions in this province, the highest per capita in the world, which many people don't necessarily realize. It's a shock to realize that Alberta has the highest per capita carbon emissions on the planet. Yes, we have a smaller population, but with our science and our amazing opportunity here we need to show leadership in these many areas that demonstrate negligence and actually further damage our primary industry.

If Keystone fails to go through, this government has to take primary responsibility for it, for failing to act on all of the threats in our environment but especially on the very slow and inadequate response to climate change. Positive communications cannot undo these failings, nor can all the visits to Washington or to British Columbia or to Ottawa. Higher standards and honest, independent monitoring and enforcement alone can restore public and international trust and respect.

Young people are awakening to this massive debt – environmental, social, and financial – as they are going to be facing it and somehow managing it. If I were a young person today, I would be anxious about my future.

Lougheed's advice, often touted and recently touted by the Finance minister here, is largely ignored. He talked very passionately about the oil sands, about managing the pace and

scale of development there, about ensuring cleanup before you extend the oil sands. No small reflection in this government of an intent to do that.

This throne speech reflects no vision but adherence to the status quo. It gives little assurance that anything has been learned from the gold rush mentality that has dominated Alberta for the past 20 years.

There's been no indication of better management of the scale and pace of development of the oil sands, as I indicated, and the environmental liabilities that mount by the day in the face of lame laments that we can't keep up with population growth. Well, what did we expect when we predicted 3 million barrels a day by 2025? Did we not expect that the population would grow? Where was the money to come from? No plan.

Other countries like Norway are capable of living off the interest of their nonrenewable resource wealth. We don't even approach anything like the leadership that Norway has shown in the public interest. Long-term public interest: that's what we're here for, and that's what we see very little evidence of in this government.

Our crucial human services and education and municipal infrastructure must live with oil price changes instead of assured, stable funding based on a stable revenue stream. We live at the whim of oil prices. What does it say about responsible leadership

in the public interest when our most vulnerable, when our hospitals, when our education system depend on the price of oil?

This province continues to plan from election to election. Let us stop resorting to black-white, simplistic thinking on the question of whether this is a government that has a spending problem or a revenue problem. This is a management problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Are there any other speakers?

Hon. Government House Leader, you're moving to adjourn debate?

Mr. Campbell: To adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Let's call it a night, and we'll meet tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:19 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 13, 2014

Issue 8a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont (PC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Hon. Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 13, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to always know what is true, pure, and just. Enlighten our minds and our hearts with thoughts of peace, respect, and freedom as we fulfill our commitment to serve others. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and, in fact, through you to all members of this august Assembly Deanna Holt. Deanna is a lifelong Calgarian who is currently working in the nonprofit sector for CUPS, an organization that is dedicated to moving individuals and families out of poverty and into independence. Further – and this may surprise you – Deanna is also a testament to the fact that the age of miracles has not passed. How, might you ask. Well, let me tell you. Deanna is also my girlfriend, whom I love very much. She is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask all members of the Assembly to give Deanna our traditional warm welcome.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of employees from the Provincial Archives of Alberta who are touring the Legislature today. These men and women are some of the fabulous individuals who work day in and day out at the archives to preserve historical documents and make them available to all Albertans. They do the important job of making sure that our past can be remembered and celebrated. I thank them all for their hard work, and I would ask them to please stand as I call their names: Kimberley Main, Sara King, Meghan Leschert, Adam Wisheu, Laurette Miller, Jaelyn Landry, and Lucas Antoniuk. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students at law who are articling at the Edmonton courts. They are here to gain an understanding of the law-making process and to explore the jurisdictional boundaries between courts and Legislatures. They met this morning with our Clerk and Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations as well as the Chief Legislative Counsel. They will meet with a couple of our members following question period. Some members here may recognize Jennifer Huygen in the group, who is not only articling as a student at law but is a former page. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you. It's indeed a pleasure of mine to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a leader in my community who is here today on his way to the northern Alberta leaders' summit in Athabasca tomorrow to be a moderator. It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Don Hnatiuk. He's

the president and CEO of the Grande Prairie Regional College, and I'm thrilled he's here today. I'd ask him to stand – I think he's standing already, Mr. Speaker; it's hard to tell – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly four representatives that are directly involved in an exciting upcoming Edmonton concert on Saturday, March 15, which commemorates the 200th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko, Ukrainian national poet, accomplished artist, and hero to the Ukrainian people world-wide. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names. I would like to welcome this afternoon Mr. Laurence Ewashko from the province of Ontario, a former conductor of the Vienna Boys' Choir, renowned world-wide for his significant contributions to vocal music, who will be directing two choirs at the Shevchenko concert; Mrs. Luba Feduschak, president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Edmonton branch; Mrs. Luba Boyko-Bell, president, Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta and vice-president Ukrainian Canadian Congress Edmonton branch; and Mr. Michael Bell, member, Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta. I would now ask the Assembly to join me and give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, you had a second introduction?

Mrs. Jablonski: That's correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I have the great privilege today of introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly Diane Gramlich, a young woman for whom I have a great deal of love and respect. Diane Gramlich is here today to hear my member's statement for Marlin Styner, her late husband and one of Alberta's most dedicated citizens. Diane Gramlich is also one of Alberta's most dedicated citizens. Diane is in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly five residents of the West Springs, Cougar Ridge, and Aspen communities. These residents, parents all, represent an advocacy group from west Calgary that's sounding the clarion call for new schools in their neighbourhood. Specifically, they need a middle school to help address capacity issues facing schools in their area. Their area currently has four of the top ten priority spots on the CBE plan. There are only three public elementary schools west of Sarcee, no middle school, one high school, all of them near or well over capacity. They have been gathering support for new schools in the area for the past six months from families in the area, and they've been tireless advocates for their communities. I'd ask them to please stand as I call their names: Mrs. Deanna Bradley, Mr. John Pantazopoulos, Mrs. Melanie Derwanz, Mrs. Robyn Plotnikoff, and Mr. Sean Alexander. I

would ask them to rise, please, and receive the traditional warm greetings of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you 55 students and their teachers Amanda Fayed and Tandy Atchison from Campbelltown elementary school in Sherwood Park. That's one of the finest schools in Sherwood Park. If they could please stand up, we could show them the warm welcome from the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the MLA for St. Albert it's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from Neil M. Ross elementary school, located in the constituency of St. Albert. Accompanying these bright and energetic students is Mrs. Savoie, Mr. Robertson, and Mr. Arlinghaus. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would thank them for coming in today, and I would ask these guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Sherwood Park, you have a second introduction?

Ms Olesen: I do. I have on my list here that a group from Our Lady of The Prairies school is here. I'm sure they're a mighty fine school, too. If they could please rise, we could show them a warm welcome.

1:40

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the mayor of Lacombe, Steve Christie. Steve has served on Lacombe council for two years. He was first elected mayor in 2010 and re-elected this past October. Steve and his wife Cheryl live in Lacombe, where they raised two daughters. He is the proud grandfather of Lylah, Lilly, and Jayda. Mayor Christie was one of my opponents in the last provincial election, and I thank him for his ongoing contribution to public service and democracy in this province. I'll ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the House Mr. Devon McDonald and Stephanie Belland. They represent two organizations. The first, Voice for Animals Humane Society, founded in 1997, is an Edmonton-based animal protection advocacy and rescue organization. V4A is dedicated to fighting the abuse and exploitation of all animals through education and lobbying on their behalf. The second: Stephanie Belland represents the Council of Concerned Albertans for Animal Welfare and Public Safety, a group of citizens who believe in active and consistent enforcement of Alberta zoo standards. The two organizations have recently joined forces in addressing the ongoing substandard conditions at Guzoo Animal Farm. Could they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Jamie Post. Jamie is the co-ordination and communications director at the Alberta Disability Workers Association, an organization which is committed to education and training for disability workers in Alberta. One of Jamie's major concerns with this PC government's 2014 budget is the lack of clarity and certainty regarding a commitment to wage increases for front-line PDD workers. I would now ask Jamie to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great group of student advocates that I met with earlier today. Bethany Tynes, Jessica Turowski, Thomas Ridgeway, and Teresa Currie join us from the Alberta Students' Executive Council. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No stranger to this Assembly, a very engaged political voice: I would like to introduce Rory Koopmans in the Legislature today and give him the honourable welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Marlin Styner

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 28, 2014, Alberta lost one of its greatest leaders in the disability community and in the province. Marlin Styner died at the age of 51 years, after filling every day with purpose even after a car crash in 1981, when he sustained a serious spinal cord injury and became a quadriplegic.

With the dedicated support of family, friends, and the community Marlin was able to fulfill one of his life's goals when he received a business administration diploma from Red Deer College. Marlin had a desire to give back to the community, so he became a passionate public speaker and volunteered wherever he could to make a difference. He spoke to over 1 million youth about injury prevention and to thousands of adults about universal design, motivation, and overcoming personal and physical barriers. I can tell you that even though Marlin lived his life in a wheelchair, he walked the talk. He was an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing him.

You can read Marlin's biography, and you will be amazed at the number of boards and agencies that he served on, including the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. You will be incredulous at the many awards he received and the many achievement awards named after Marlin. Marlin was an extraordinary person who made this a better world. He taught me and many others about the importance of accessibility and visibility.

In the last 13 years of his life Marlin had an angel by his side: his wife, Diane Gramlich. I can't say enough about the dedication

and love that I have seen in Diane's words and actions. Marlin's parents, Roy and Nora Styner, were totally dedicated to their son with their unconditional love and support.

Marlin had many, many friends who loved and appreciated him. Close to 1,000 friends and family attended his celebration of life on Monday.

We will all miss Marlin. We will miss his passion, his words of wisdom, his friendship, his love for others, and his smile.

Please join me in thanking Marlin Styner and Diane Gramlich for their outstanding, passionate, and dedicated service to the people of Alberta. [Standing ovation]

The Deputy Speaker: I'd recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for the next member's statement.

Farm Worker Labour Protection

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Agricultural Safety Week reminds us that agriculture is still one of the most dangerous occupations in Alberta. Over the past 20 years 355 farm workers have died, including four to eight children per year. Unlike nearly all other occupations in Alberta, however, farm workers do not have the benefit of occupational health and safety standards or workers' compensation even in large industrial cattle, hog, dairy, grain, potato, and sugar beet operations: for every death approximately 25 hospital admissions each year, resulting in millions of dollars borne by the public health system instead of employer insurance through WCB. One would think the increasing rates of child deaths would motivate this government to legislate child labour standards also, but no.

Three years ago the Premier promised to address this gross inequity and has done nothing. Recently the minister of jobs initiated an OH and S inspection of ski hills, which resulted in a 60 per cent reduction in infractions from the previous year to protect health. To quote the minister: employers in other high-risk industries should take notice; we're coming to visit them next. End of quote. When will this include industrial farming operations? To quote Dr. Bob Barnetson of Athabasca University: low labour costs reduce the price of food, and cheap food policy meets the needs of both businesses and nonagricultural workers and is a form of state subsidy to the business community. End quote. However, keeping labour costs low results in greater injury to low-income workers and violates their rights to equal treatment in the workplace, including the right to know about hazards and refuse unsafe work conditions.

Farmers exert significant pressure on this government to maintain the status quo because exploiting farm workers helps them cope with the financial pressures they face from agribusiness. Decades of fruitless advocacy led by two courageous former farm workers, Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, have been ignored. It's reprehensible that the only recourse now appears to be a costly constitutional challenge on behalf of those who feed us against the Alberta government to achieve the most basic of worker rights in the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

School Construction Needs

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak for the thousands of parents who despite our best efforts still need schools for their children to attend. My riding in particular is

in dire need of at least one school to keep young children in their own neighbourhood, properly rested and ready to learn.

Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed news reports of dozens of parents filling the lobby at the Calgary board of education this week to file an appeal. Well, these same parents along with some 4,000 others from the area are signatories on a petition that I will be presenting to this House.

West Springs is home to nearly 8,000 people, with a 36 per cent growth rate over the last five years, and it borders Aspen Woods and Cougar Ridge, where the need for a middle school is also dire. There are 5,200 people living in Aspen Woods, nearly 6,000 in Cougar Ridge, and they have teamed with the West Springs residents to bring a middle school to the area.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Calgary board of education has its own system for assessing need when deciding who gets a school, and heaven forbid that I would intrude on that process, but I also realize that the members opposite have their own system for assessing the need for schools in this province. On February 13 of this year the Member for Airdrie said that he thinks we're going to have enough schools, a statement most school boards would disagree with. Heaven forbid that I would intrude on that process.

Mr. Speaker, I can and do speak to the need to continue with the work that we have been doing for the last year. Building Alberta has already announced the construction of 50 new schools, schools that are needed to keep our province moving forward, but we cannot stop there. The need is too great. Our province must meet the needs of the population, a population that's growing in leaps and bounds. Thirty-six hundred new students entered Calgary's public school system last fall, and the CBE expects another 9,000 new students over the next three years.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Cabinet Travel to Grande Prairie

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier repaid \$45,000 for the South Africa trip, and I'd like to congratulate her for finally doing the right thing. However, we know that this is not the only instance of abuse. We now know that the Premier and her cabinet ministers used government aircraft to attend partisan PC fundraisers, as they did on October 25, 2012. The flight manifest lists the reason for the trip as meetings with government officials. To the Transportation minister, who was on that flight that day. The plane landed at 4:32 p.m. The PC fundraiser began at 5:20 p.m. Which government officials did he meet with in those 48 minutes?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. This gives me the opportunity to talk about all the flights I took around Alberta that week. That week I flew to Lethbridge, I flew to Medicine Hat, I flew to Edson, and I flew to High Prairie to announce hospital announcements, and the fifth one in that roll of announcements happened to be in Grande Prairie. I'm glad she gave me the opportunity to stand up and tell the people watching today how this government is building Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The real answer is no one.

Mr. Speaker, it's beyond alarming that these ministers don't know the difference between a government event and a PC Party event, and that's exactly why we're in this mess. Since the Transportation minister can't seem to grasp that difference, let's try the Health minister, who was also on the flight that day. The plane landed at 4:32 p.m. The PC fundraiser began at 5:20 p.m. Which government officials did he meet with in those 48 minutes before the PC fundraiser began and where?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, these questions have been asked and answered several times this week, including a considerable portion of House time that was devoted yesterday to a point of privilege presented against myself that was not upheld by the Speaker. We've answered these questions. We're ready to move on.

Ms Smith: You may be able to take two different accounts and believe they're both true, but we know that the public is not going to believe that.

They say that they had a media event planned that day in Grande Prairie, but no media notices went out. According to the day's ministerial absences neither the Health minister nor the Transportation minister nor the Premier were expected to be absent from this Assembly that day, meaning they were scheduled to be right here when the supposed media event was going to happen. To the Finance minister: will he just admit his colleagues abused the government plane to attend a PC Party fundraiser and get the money back?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this government works every day. This government works in every community across this province. The Premier and ministers travel to parts of the province to meet with Albertans, to talk with Albertans about their issues and their concerns, and to let Albertans know when something exciting is happening in their community that they've been requesting for a long, long time, and that's exactly what happened this day and every other day the opposition complains about. The public of Alberta wants to see their ministers, wants to see their Premier, and wants to talk about the exciting way that we're building Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader, your next main question.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they clearly have learned nothing from their recent troubles.

Public Body Executive Travel Expenses

Ms Smith: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler has been raising some very important points about abuse of taxpayer dollars in Travel Alberta, an agency of the government. Many of the worst practices that the opposition works hard at exposing in the government appear to be going on here: expensing tuxedo rentals, expensive bottles of wine, \$99 steaks, among other abuses. These employees are government appointees. Will the Premier extend Treasury Board expense rules and oversight to these entities?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear on this issue. While I am very proud of the work that Travel Alberta does and what they have achieved, I am not at all happy about any suggestion of improper expense claims. That's why I've directed Travel Alberta to conduct a full and thorough review of all

expenses, and that review is to be conducted by an independent third party. Only by doing this can Albertans be assured that the tourism marketing agency is conducting itself in full accordance with the stated expense policies which are followed by Travel Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Hon. leader, your first supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member from Drumheller-Stettler has made clear, the senior people at agencies, boards, and commissions deserve increased scrutiny. You may recall that the government sunshine list does not cover the salaries and benefits of those who work for these organizations. To the Premier: when will her government expand the sunshine list to include all of the additional employees who get money from the taxpayer?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Scott: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's great to have an opportunity to speak about our government's sunshine list. It's been called a big win for taxpayers. It's been called the gold standard example for other jurisdictions to follow. We are looking at the legal framework to expand our policy, and that work is under way.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, all of the very highest paid government employees work for agencies, boards, and commissions. For instance, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, ATB Financial, and the Alberta Electric System Operator all have employees that earn more than \$800,000 a year. This means that the sunshine list, far from being transparent and complete and a gold standard, does not disclose the pay and perks for the most expensive people on the government payroll. When will the Premier expand the sunshine list to include all taxpayer-paid employees?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this government is delivering unprecedented transparency. It's something this government promised and something we're delivering. Part of that is our expense disclosure policy. Part of that is the whistle-blower legislation that we delivered. Now we have delivered a sunshine list, and we are looking at ways to expand that, and that work is under way.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader, your next main question.

Ms Smith: I guess that answer is still no, Mr. Speaker.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Ms Smith: Yesterday the Premier did the right thing. Earlier in the week the Minister of Municipal Affairs also did the right thing when he announced that the government was firing LandLink. There are reports that in Medicine Hat LandLink was paid \$26 million to distribute about \$20 million to affected homeowners after the 2010 flood. Now, that clearly can't be right, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans won't know for sure unless the minister releases the terms of their contract. Will the minister release the contract and tell Albertans how many millions of disaster relief dollars LandLink will keep?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I made clear yesterday – and I saw some erroneous news reports yesterday that I'd like to clarify as well. The transition contract with LandLink actually commences

at the end of March. The contract that they're currently in ends at the end of March. There's a transition one after that. There are about a dozen DRP files that remain open, where the government of Canada actually still owes Alberta money as well. Some of those files are still quite open.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister committed to closing 90 per cent of the DRP claims in the next 17 days . . .

An Hon. Member: Residential.

Ms Smith: Residential claims – fair enough – 90 per cent of them. . . . despite the fact that minimal progress has been made in the last nine months, as he well knows. We are concerned about how they're going to do this. I'm already hearing reports of homeowners getting file closure letters when their issues have not been resolved. I am predicting that this is going to be a mess. How will the minister deal with the improperly closed cases after LandLink is supposedly done on March 31?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, there is a deliberate attempt here, it would appear, to misrepresent what I have said. What I have said is that LandLink will continue to be responsible through this transition phase to administer the 2013 DRP program. It could take some time to resolve all outstanding files. What I asked the officials to do was to bring me a proposal whereby we could close 90 per cent of the residential files by the end of March. Now, we have . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader, your final supplemental.

Ms Smith: It's not quite what the minister said yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

But the minister did say that he wanted to hear from people about their files. Now, my constituency office gets lots of requests for help from families who are desperate for assistance with the disaster recovery program. When people come to us for help with the health system, with workers' compensation, or any other government program, there are defined processes and liaison people we can contact. But if it's a DRP file, there's no one we can speak to, no process to get information, and the information we do manage to get is very often deceitful. How will the minister change that?

2:00

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. leader would not actually suggest that deceitful is the normal course of business. I can tell you that the process is quite open. In fact, the Premier has appointed three very able associate ministers who work with individuals throughout the province, throughout the areas that have been affected. We've paid out just in the town of High River 2,200 DRP payments as of last Friday. We also have an independent DRP appeals branch to review . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Child Poverty

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has promised to eliminate child poverty by 2017, an extraordinary claim, particularly as we approach the halfway mark of her term, we presume. The former Human Services minister excused the lack of progress by saying that they'd not settled on a definition of child poverty. Now, other jurisdictions have put in place many concrete actions to eliminate child poverty – school breakfast

programs, child tax benefits, affordable child care – but so far nothing from this government. To the Human Services minister: after 43 years in power has your government yet defined child poverty? If so, what is it?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with our stakeholders, and we'll be coming out with an action plan, a strategy on child poverty. Child poverty is something that affects countless Alberta families. There's no question about that. There's no doubt, though, that Alberta's robust economy, Alberta's robust set of opportunities help all families. We know that child poverty can't be alleviated without working specifically with underlying issues and causes of poverty for all Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Minister, I'll give you another chance. Have you defined child poverty yet, and if so, what is it? What is the definition of child poverty?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, there are a multitude of different measures in defining poverty – period – a multitude of them. What I'm interested in is how we can help those that are suffering, that don't have all the opportunities that the rest of us may enjoy, how we can help them move on, and how we can help them further advance their opportunities. We're moving forward with initiatives like the youth plan on homelessness. I had a series of meetings yesterday meeting with specific . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, core funding for a single parent with a child in this province is \$600 to \$1,000 a month. How can anybody take you seriously when you say that you want to address child poverty?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I'm tempted to say: how can anyone take that party over there seriously when they've done the types of things they've done over the past period of time? But that would be silly. That would be below us.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta is a place with great opportunities, but there are those that are, unfortunately, stuck in the continuous cycle of poverty. We have to do everything we can to help them move out of that. That means working very, very closely with all of our partners to make sure we break the cycle, and that's what we're going to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Medical Laboratory Services Contract

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the deadline for the request for proposals closed on the massive privatization of lab services in Edmonton. The request for proposal clearly states that Alberta Health Services can make public the names of those people who have submitted propositions under the RFP. Albertans have a right to this information. To the Minister of Health: will you ensure the release of the list of bidders on that RFP to the public right away, and if not, why not?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have in front of me the details of the RFP to which the hon. member is referring. I'll be pleased to look into that. Certainly, if a commitment has been made and if the rules and procedures governing the RFP allow that information to be made public, it will be.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that. If the minister will tell us when, that would be great.

A number of the companies that are understood to be bidders on this \$3 billion privatization contract have repeatedly been accused and convicted in the United States of overcharging state governments for their services. Albertans have a right to know if it is acceptable to this PC government to award a \$3 billion contract to a company with a history of illegal activity. Is it, Minister?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member – and I’m sure he knows this – is clearly within the realm of speculation. I’m not going to aid and abet the characterization of any organization that may have chosen to respond to an open tender for proposals, particularly for such an important project in our health care system. He’ll have to make do with that.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks, but I’m not going to make do with it, Mr. Speaker.

The question to the minister is: as a matter of government policy does the government award major contracts to companies with a history of illegal activity? Yes or no?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the rules and procedures that govern procurement practices in the government and in Alberta Health Services as an agency of the government of Alberta are clearly spelled out. I’m sure the hon. member can take a few moments to educate himself as to what those rules and procedures would be, and in doing so, he would recognize that this is not a matter of policy. This is a matter of appropriate procurement practice, to which we adhere in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, the time for preambles has passed, so in the next set of questions there will be no preambles after the first opening question.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, it’s getting more and more difficult to trust anything that this Education minister says about the discovery learning rewrite of the Alberta curriculum. In this House he stands and says that it’s absolute rubbish that his department is shifting away from traditional learning, but in his own Inspiring Education report he promises to shift education to a process of inquiry and discovery, and as we speak, this is how our kids are being taught. Minister, why are you backing away from your own document, or are you trying to confuse parents, just as you are their kids?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it’s good to finally hear that the Wildrose does not support Inspiring Education. They do not support the initiatives that were in Inspiring Education, and they don’t support that document. That means no dual crediting, no high school flexibility. We would go back to PATs and not the new student learner assessments.

But I’m happy to answer the question that he’s posed. The new curriculum that we’re talking about – and let’s be clear. Curriculum is not just instruction. Curriculum is the what; instruction is the how. So when we’re talking about curriculum redesign, we’re talking about what the outcomes are . . . [interjections] Clearly, they don’t want to hear.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member. First supplemental, with no preamble.

Mr. McAllister: Let’s be clear, Mr. Speaker. What Wildrose supports is listening to parents, teachers, and students.

Given that the words “discover” or “discovery” appear 13 times in this minister’s Inspiring Education report, why does the minister continue pushing this New Age, edubabble-filled report and philosophy on Alberta families when thousands of Alberta parents and teachers are pleading with him to go back to the basics, that have served Alberta kids so well for so long?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the other thing parents want is that they want schools, and they don’t support that either.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing wrong with using the word . . . [interjections] There’s nothing wrong with using the word “discovery” in a document. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: I think we’d like to hear the answer, hon. members.

Mr. J. Johnson: I’m happy to give an answer, Mr. Speaker. There’s nothing wrong with using the word “discovery” in a document. It doesn’t mean that we’re moving towards a system that they’ve described, where the student is completely self-directing their learning or where the teacher is simply the partner in education. That is absolutely rubbish. We already use inquiry-based learning. Those are methods . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McAllister: If the minister would stick to one story, he wouldn’t be stuck for an answer when I ask him questions.

Given that Manitoba’s recent experiment with discovery learning came to a screeching halt when that province’s education minister said that there has to be a basic foundation in regard to adding and subtracting and memorizing facts and knowing how to do math at an early age, why is the minister insistent on adopting a model that has failed elsewhere and is clearly failing here in Alberta?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. Our system is fantastic. He says that it’s on the skids. He has said that our system is on the skids and it’s failing. It’s not. We’re one of the top-performing jurisdictions in the world, but we can do better. It’s not the basics and old school. It’s not rote memorizations or inquiry-based learning or discovery learning. All of those things can happen together. Those are best left up to the professionals in the classroom to decide what methods to use in instruction. We’re talking about curriculum, which is the what, which is the outcome of the system. We’re not talking about the method of instruction. They want to continue to try to confuse Albertans, and hopefully that separates . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:10

Traffic Court Reform Initiative

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I have heard lots of concerns from my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods about reforming traffic tickets court. It has been suggested that a new administrative process would be in place that would replace the traditional court system. My question to the minister: why do we have to reform the traffic court in this manner?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Traffic ticket court cases are the most common case in Alberta by a long shot, 1.9 million traffic court cases a year, roughly 300,000 criminal court cases by comparison. It involves a lot of time for police officers but also a lot of time for the public when they deal with long lineups. These lineups are only going to get worse as Alberta keeps attracting more and more people, and having a traffic court in the downtown has also been raised as an issue. We're looking into this because there has to be a better way and a more efficient way to respect the whole issue behind traffic tickets.

Mr. Quadri: To the same minister again: is it true that Albertans will lose their right to fight a traffic ticket?

Mr. Denis: One-word answer: no. I don't believe that it would be constitutional in any way to go and deal with that particular matter.

I think it's more important to have an easier and less intimidating process that serves the needs of all Albertans, knowing that the vast majority of people dealing with traffic tickets do so on their own as self-represented litigants, without a lawyer or traffic ticket agent, even though that is their right.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your final supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again. I would ask the minister to stand in this House and guarantee that Albertans will not lose their right to fight a traffic ticket.

Mr. Denis: The one thing, Mr. Speaker, that is not on the table with our consultation with respect to traffic court reform is the right to fight a ticket. That will never be infringed, period. You'll always have the right to fight a traffic ticket, full stop.

I want to hear from all Albertans on this. E-mail me at traffic.reform@gov.ab.ca. I want to hear from you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Sherwood Park. [interjections]

Hon. members, please. We'd like to hear the questions and the answers.

Abuse of Seniors in Care

Mrs. Towle: On February 28 the government quietly released the protection for persons in care report on their website, nine months after it was due, alarming since the report found that there were 166 confirmed cases of abuse. Even more alarming is that the report comes on the heels of three health care workers being charged for abusing a senior in care. This isn't the first time this has happened. Sadly, it's not even the second. Wildrose has brought several cases of abuse to this minister's attention, and every time this minister told Albertans that these were one-offs. Minister, how can Albertans have confidence in the safety of their loved ones in care when your own government delays the very reports they rely on?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure neither this minister nor any member of this government ever said that these situations were one-offs. These are matters that we take extremely seriously. I spoke to this after the report was released. In fact, I'm surprised it took the opposition this long to raise the report in the Legislative Assembly. We have very strong protection for persons in care legislation in this province. I have asked my department to go back and look at recommendations that have been made, including

the recommendations this year with respect to founded allegations of abuse to ensure those recommendations . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Towle: I'll remind the minister that it was the government's job to release the report in July of last year.

Minister, Albertans cannot comprehend or even imagine a senior being abused, let alone learn from your own report that 22 per cent of the abuses that were founded were of a sexual nature. What is the minister doing to stop this horrific abuse?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the people of this province cannot imagine any member of this Assembly trying to make cheap political points by exploiting these situations.

Mr. Speaker, the responsible position and the position of this government is to do everything we can to make sure that the very strong legislation that we have is enforced. This legislation includes a very broad definition of the term "abuse." Many members of this caucus, including the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, spent the last part of the fall touring the province, making people aware that this legislation exists and how to access it . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your final supplemental. No preamble.

Mrs. Towle: Standing up for Albertans is never considered cheap politics, Minister.

There are 18 founded instances of sexual abuse of seniors in care in your very own report, that you delayed for nine months. Why have Albertans not heard of 18 charges being laid against the alleged abusers?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I've asked the Department of Health to look at all of the founded allegations of abuse, to ensure the recommendations that were made are being implemented, and in addition to look at what else we can do to strengthen the compliance mechanisms. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I'm at the point where I can't even hear my own answer. I'll conclude by saying that we take the issue extremely seriously. We have loved ones in care as well. There is absolutely no excuse for any instance of abuse in this province, and this legislation is in place to protect Albertans from any such event.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, please. When we ask a question, I would assume we would like to hear the answer and not heckle the minister while he's trying to answer it. [interjections] Please.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Skilled Trades Journeyman Certification

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's strong labour market is a trademark of this province. A key element of this success is the exceptional apprenticeship training programs we have in place. However, it's been brought to my attention that some individuals have experienced significant delays in receiving their Alberta journeyman certificates even after successful completion of their programs. To the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education: can you please identify potential causes for these delays?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important question. The hon. member is correct. We are experiencing delays in the certification process due to a very high number of applicants. In recognition of the importance of getting these certificates to tradespeople, our ministry has assigned staff temporarily to process the files that are ready for certification and to deal with the backlog as quickly as possible. The review process is significant and necessary to ensure that individuals certified have met all the standards that are expected of a certified tradesperson, but we must do that in an expeditious way, and we will.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that these workers need a physical certificate to complete advanced training in their respective fields and that these certificates sometimes can be delayed for a variety of reasons, has the option of an online certification or proof of completion system been explored?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the official certificate itself is of value to the tradesperson but so is the proof of certification, which could be done more easily, perhaps, online. We are exploring that option so that they can have the proof of their certification in hand on a timely basis so that they can pursue further educational opportunities. Of course, the certification itself doesn't hold up their ability to work or their ability to work at an advanced level as long as they have the proof that they've achieved that status. We're working to do that as quickly as we can.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Hon. member, your final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. Given that there are concerns that trade programs will be overlooked in favour of traditional university programs, can the same minister please identify for the House current initiatives in place that demonstrate a strong commitment to these trade and technical school programs?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is very important. It's very important that as we talk about Albertans advancing their education, we celebrate and encourage every type of education. Trades and apprenticeship programs are a very, very important part of the education system in this province. In fact, we educate 22 per cent of the apprentices across the country. That's much, much higher than the level of our population, obviously. So we take it very seriously, and we encourage it a lot. The new Bill 1, with \$200 million going into the Alberta heritage scholarship fund, will actually enhance by \$9 million a year the funds that we . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Farm Worker Labour Protection

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For decades this PC government has dodged and ignored the basic 19th century human rights of paid farm workers to have a safe workplace under the guise of, quote, protecting the family farm. End quote.

Somehow Saskatchewan and B.C. have managed to do both. The Premier committed to closing loopholes that allow agriculture to exclude paid farm workers, including children, from occupational health and safety standards and workers' compensation. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: are you going to legislate for paid farm workers, the people that feed us . . .

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister. [interjection] I've recognized the minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. I wanted to make sure I heard the entire question, Mr. Speaker. It is important what the member is saying. Those are the people who feed us, and because of the importance they play in our society not only within Alberta but Canada – actually, Alberta is becoming the breadbasket of the world – we will make sure that we will work with that industry. I have been meeting with stakeholders in the industry. They recognize the importance of keeping their workers and their families safe just like the member and I do. They're Albertans. They share these values. We will get to the point we have to get to in due course.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's about 60 years since we've been talking about this issue in this province.

Why will you not at least order that the deaths of farm workers be investigated? How are we to learn and to prevent these in the future if we will not even investigate them?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I may appear mature beyond my age, but I have not been engaging in this discussion for 60 years. I can tell you that I don't think it's a secret to anyone in this House, in Alberta that I take occupational health and safety very seriously not only because it is my responsibility in this ministry, but it is something that I was engaged in in my life prior to being elected. I can assure this member that the safety of farm workers and their families, who may be engaged in farming, is as important to me as it is to him. I'll also assure him that the industry is taking this very seriously now.

Dr. Swann: Let me ask you directly. Is it you or is it the Premier that's stalling on this legislation?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to weigh in on this. First of all, I'll say that I appreciate the hon. member's question because it is a matter of great concern to us, too. We're very interested in this issue. I would not like him to leave the impression that nothing has been done. There has been a lot of activity. I'm interested, even, in provinces that maybe have legislation. They seem to be focusing on the awareness, the education, and so on as to what really makes the difference. I was reading recently in the *Western Producer* that that seemed to be the theme. That's something that we're putting a lot of money into. We've got a number of different programs that I could mention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Legal Challenges to Provincial Legislation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has not been scoring big points with the courts lately. On environmental protection they've said that government action served to "ignore

the purposes of the Act as published” and that through their behaviour “the valid object” of the environmental protection act is “hijacked” and also that “it is difficult to envision a more direct apprehension of bias.” To the Attorney General. Now, I know that today of all days it’s a really complicated thing to figure out who’s in charge of what; however, this is your job. Why can’t you get your cabinet colleagues to follow their own laws?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I’m not exactly sure where that question was meandering towards. It’s incumbent upon all of us to follow the laws of the land but also to ask appropriate questions. Maybe for the second question she can be a little bit more clear.

Ms Notley: I think it’s pretty clear.

Given that a more recent judicial decision concluded that the government’s behaviour in relation to Bill 46 “raises the question of whether those negotiations were . . . conducted in good faith” and given that the obligation to negotiate in good faith isn’t discretionary but is actually another statutory obligation, will the Attorney General admit that he doesn’t appear to hold any sway at all when it comes to getting his colleagues to follow their own laws?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, there’s one thing that I have no sway over entirely, and that is matters before the courts. I refer this member to Standing Order 23(g), and I will just leave it at that because that matter is before the courts.

Ms Notley: It’s not, actually.

Given that both of these judicial decisions, which concluded that the government actions have been biased, breached the principles of environmental legislation, breached the legal obligation to bargain in good faith, and likely contravened the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and given that it’s your job to make your colleagues respect the rule of law, is the problem that they won’t listen to you, or is it that you agree with the rest of them that your government should be above the law?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, I refer this member to Standing Order 23(g). The matter dealing with Bill 46 is before the courts. No one is above the law, including this member and myself.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After 50 years of failed negotiations this government was finally able to secure a deal for the southwest Calgary ring road. That was a major win for the city and the residents and constituents of Calgary-Shaw. Seeing as this is now a funded project in the government’s capital plan, there should be no hiding from these questions today. This question has been asked by my constituents many times, and I’m hopeful the Minister of Transportation can give us a crystal clear answer. When will the southwest ring road be started, and when will it be completed?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member said, thanks to some good work of my colleague last year, that agreement was reached with the Tsuu T’ina nation, and we have an agreement to have that land, so we can finish the ring road. In the three-year budget there is \$1.8 billion budgeted for that project. We all know that isn’t enough money to do that project, but that’s all that’s

shown in the three years. This project is going to take seven or eight years to complete, and we’ll work diligently to get it done as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your first supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you can drive on Stoney Trail, the Calgary ring road, from highway 1 all the way to Macleod Trail, a distance of 70 kilometres, without hitting a single traffic light yet you hit two, back to back, once you reach that interchange, will the Minister of Transportation commit to addressing this critical piece of infrastructure as its top priority during construction of the southwest ring road?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, we just improved that intersection. There are setbacks from one approach to another. There are minimum setbacks. In that section there isn’t enough room to build the exact design we’d want just because of the restrictions in distances.

Mr. Wilson: A puzzling answer, but maybe the Infrastructure minister should have taken it.

Given that building out the interchange on McLeod Trail and constructing the planned interchanges at 6th Street SW and James McKeivitt Road, along Stoney Trail, would seem to be a very reasonable first step in the construction of this road and given that there is no need to wait for the completion of a land transfer in order to start these projects, will the minister tell this House when those interchanges will be started and when they will be completed?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, that intersection isn’t necessarily all to do with Alberta Transportation. It’s partly with the city. I can look up specifically the member’s answers, but I can’t know every intersection in the province of Alberta. I’ll seriously take his question and get the answer and get back to him.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for St. Albert, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Youth Emergency Services

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency youth shelters offer food, counselling, support, and life-skills training in a safe and supportive environment for young people who are in need of short-term emergency housing. However, due to the lack of shelter space in St. Albert many of my constituents are forced to go to Edmonton for support and a safe place to stay. St. Albert families have told me that the experience of our youth being placed in shelters in downtown Edmonton often leads to exposure to the very types of dangerous and high-risk activities from which they are seeking solace. To the Minister of Human Services: are there any plans to address the need for youth shelters in St. Albert?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member raises a very, very valid point. It’s actually something that I’ve noticed first-hand. When I’ve been visiting youth shelters in Edmonton, I’ve noticed that there’s a large proportion of youth that come from all over the province. They migrate to the city, and this is where a lot of them end up seeking supports. Notwithstanding that, I’m more than prepared to work with the member to see how we can help provide additional services and supplement some

great services that are already in place in St. Albert, like the family resource centres.

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

Mr. Khan: I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. St. Albert youths who require emergency shelter cope with heartbreaking issues like abuse and addiction or cope with complex issues like FASD. Just last month I had a young man, battling addiction, in my office looking for some help. To the same minister: what are you doing to help those in youth shelters transition back to their communities?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, in this year's budget we've got a 17 per cent increase for homeless supports, and some of that money is actually devoted to youth homelessness.

On another note, the member mentioned issues of abuse and trauma, and I've got to say that abuse and trauma are by far the biggest indicators of youth homelessness and youth challenges and developmental challenges later in life. So I've been speaking a lot about our absolute need to get into the root causes. Preventing childhood trauma and abuse is one of the biggest . . .

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to working with the minister on this issue.

To the same minister: given that children in need who are of elementary age generally receive more support than those youth in high school, what is your ministry doing to ensure that youth of an older demographic are not shortchanged emergency supports?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a great question. There is a lot of focus on early childhood development, and then there sometimes is not as much focus on the adolescent years, so that's why we're working right now on a plan to end youth homelessness. We've invested dollars in this year's budget to support that as well. This is a really significant issue. I've met with many young people that actually are homeless. They're, unfortunately, homeless because of the really severe issues they face.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's electricity market is a complex system that is stacked against consumers. Every day companies offer to sell their electricity to the grid, but unlike in a normal auction market, the lowest price that companies are willing to accept for their electricity doesn't matter. The market guarantees the company will get paid the highest price regardless of the lowest offer. We know this fills the wallets of industry. How does this system work for Albertans when companies are guaranteed to receive the highest price for the lowest cost electricity?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on protecting Albertan consumers and ensuring a reliable, affordable electricity system. Like in any market, there are rules, and that's why the Market Surveillance Administrator has the power to investigate to make sure the rules are followed. Our government is focused on what is important to Albertans: protecting Alberta consumers and ensuring affordable and reliable electricity that meets the needs of Alberta today and in our growing economy.

Mr. Anglin: The rules are rigged against the customer.

Given the Premier only decided to pay back Albertans after numerous questions, there is hope we might get an answer from the Energy minister to a question that has been asked in this Assembly multiple times. Is it permissible, under Alberta's market rules, for a company to withhold electricity from the market in order to raise prices? Yes or no?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my last answer, there are rules to this system. The Market Surveillance Administrator is able to investigate those rules if there's anything wrong happening in the market. That is their job to do. If they see anything, they then take it to the AUC. But I want to tell you that we have been working very hard as this economy is growing to make sure that Albertans are receiving a good price with the regulated market. On the price: this month's average on our regular rate option is 7.13 cents per kilowatt hour, down, in fact, from last year.

Mr. Anglin: Notice she doesn't mention the wholesale price of \$400 a megawatt.

Given that B.C. Hydro conserves its power production at night by buying electricity from Alberta at about 3 cents a kilowatt and given that B.C. Hydro then turns around and sells that electricity, which we just helped them to save, the very next day to Alberta for 6 cents a kilowatt hour, double, will this government do a complete and independent audit of this silly gaming practice and tell us how it came to be that Albertans have been subsidizing B.C. consumers to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars for the last several years?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said to start with, our government is focused on protecting Alberta consumers. That's job one for us. Alberta has been ranked second in North America for residential retail markets for consumer choice. We are doing what's right. We have no long-term debt, no debt. Alberta's prices are good prices, and we are doing everything in Alberta to protect Alberta consumers.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Spring Flood Mitigation

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents in my constituency of Banff-Cochrane have expressed concern regarding spring flood mitigation efforts. Municipalities were funded through the flood recovery erosion control program for short-term mitigation

projects; however, residents are not seeing the advancement of some of these programs and are concerned about the readiness for spring. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is being done to ensure that these critical short-term mitigation projects by both municipalities and the government are completed in time for spring runoff?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to thank this hon. member for his very thoughtful question and for the good work he's done on behalf of people throughout southern Alberta as a result after the flood. Obviously, we have recently approved \$150 million for the flood recovery erosion control program and streamlined the approval process. You know, we're working very closely with municipalities to make sure that we, both the province and the municipalities, understand what the needs are and that we're in the position to move forward as early as possible.

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

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: but what is the government doing to monitor the progress of these projects and to ensure that municipalities have the capacity to complete them on time?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, we're actually getting projects approved much more quickly, first off. In some cases ESRD has been able to approve projects as quickly as in five days, in some cases 20 days. Then we've also got very skilled task force employees and ESRD employees who are working directly with the impacted municipalities. We're working hard to empower these municipalities to make sure that they get these projects done on time, ready for the spring flood season.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member. Your final supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Thank you. To the same minister: are there plans to have developed a functional early warning system for communities for this spring?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think we learned a lot from last year, and much has been taken on. There's already a system in place through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. We're working with key partners, most notably the river forecast section within ESRD, to understand and communicate with Albertans as effectively as possible in whatever ways people want to be communicated with. We will continue to invest in this program to make sure that people can be alerted if there are challenges coming at them and that they understand what they can do in order to protect themselves.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sage Grouse Protection Order

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The imposition of the sage grouse protection order has many southern Albertans worried about their economic future and the future of their communities. The restrictive provisions of the protection order risk reduced revenues not only for oil and gas but also for ranchers and municipalities. Meanwhile this government is silent. Can the minister tell me when the province will stand up for ranchers and municipalities, who together are the best local stewards of the land?

The Deputy Speaker: We've got the Minister of ESRD.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. We as a provincial government weren't very happy either with the fact that the federal government put their order in place. As a matter of fact, we weren't very happy that we got the order the afternoon before they did it the next day. But I have had discussions with our counterparts from Saskatchewan, and we are together going to work with the federal minister to see what we can do to make sure that the sage grouse area that is protected is done in a feasible manner and to make sure that there is no economic hardship for people in the southeastern part of this province.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PC government's South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council called for a 4,200-square-kilometre expansion of a conservation area in Cypress-Medicine Hat. Again to the minister: did the province purposely neglect taking action on protecting the sage grouse in order to allow the federal government to establish a conservation area?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be farther from the truth. We understand that the sage grouse was a species at risk. Again, the federal government has SARA, which is federal legislation, and I will say to you that it causes me nothing but angst because we do have areas in this province where we do have species at risk. But it's imperative for us to work with the federal government, to work with stakeholders and landowners all across this province to do what we can. I must also say that, you know, if the hon. member wants to put his anger at some people – I mean, again, things happen in southeastern B.C., for example, and we put nesting for hawks and other raptors down there. These raptors are sitting on these fences and sitting on these power lines, and they're looking down . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the population of the sage grouse has been declining since the 1960s and knowing that the PCs have had decades in government to produce solutions to help the sage grouse, why do ranchers, oil and gas, and municipalities in the area have to pay for this PC lack of attention?

2:40

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have worked on this for a long time. We have always wanted to have a good relationship with Montana and Saskatchewan. I guess the bottom line is that

we appreciate private landowners' rights, and we're not about to trample on them. So that's where we're at today.

Cancer Prevention and Treatment

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, every day 500 Canadians are diagnosed with cancer. Statistics show that an estimated 2 out of every 5 will develop cancer in their lifetime and that an estimated 1 out of 4 will die from it. Changing our future: Alberta's cancer plan to 2030, the Ministry of Health's program, was implemented in order to put into operation effective and sustainable strategies to reduce cancer in the province by 2030. I sure hope that that report is not sitting on a shelf somewhere. To the hon. Minister of Health: what preventative measures will be implemented in the next 10 years?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta cancer plan is very much alive and well. We see the embodiment of the spirit of the cancer plan in efforts that were made such as the hon. member's earlier this week, when he participated in an important fundraising campaign to support kids' cancer care. There are a number of preventative measures already in place. We will see more action as we go forward. So far we've seen some very progressive and far-reaching legislation passed in this House to protect children and youth from tobacco use. We're working with the Canadian partnership against breast cancer to increase screening rates for women no matter where they live. Similar actions are being taken . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Dorward: What supports are available to my constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar and their families in order to deal with the physical and mental toll of this disease when it happens in their lives?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member alluded to, the statistics are indeed startling. Each day in Alberta 45 Albertans are diagnosed with cancer, and 15 people die of cancer in this province every day. There are a number of options for people that are newly diagnosed, including the ongoing supports that allow family members to take time off work to support a loved one, thanks to the efforts of the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, right through to investments being made in radiation and cancer treatment centres across the province in our corridor that stretches from Grande Prairie to Lethbridge.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, cancer does not just exist in the cities. What's happening in rural Alberta to help those Albertans with cancer?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important initiatives, as I alluded to in the last question, is the establishment of the cancer corridor. With new radiation treatment centres in places such as Red Deer and Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and eventually Grande Prairie people who live in far-reaching parts of the province have to travel a shorter distance in order to receive that sort of treatment. We know that makes a difference for them in terms of their access. We also know it makes a huge difference for families and friends and neighbours and loved ones who support people who are newly diagnosed.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I want to congratulate you, hon. members. We got through 17 sets of questions and answers today, and there were no points of order.

In 30 seconds, hon. members, I'll call for the first of the rest of the members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park. Your member's statement.

Sherwood Park Environmental Technology Enterprises

Ms Olesen: Yes. Thank you. I rise today to commend the Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce for their role in promoting environmentally friendly and innovative technologies. Three years ago our chamber established an environment committee to promote and develop environmentally friendly businesses. They have now transitioned that committee to expand the chamber's role in green economies by further emphasizing innovative, sustainable technologies.

Committee members include Clearflow Enviro Systems Group Inc., makers of products to clean water and land, who, incidentally, won the 2013 business leaders of Edmonton award and the 2013 Alberta science and technology award; SepTech Solutions Canada Inc., that has a proprietary technology to remediate septic systems and eliminate the need for vacuum tanks; Christenson Group of Companies, focusing on environmentally friendly construction and technology such as Built Green and LEED; Biogénie, a division of EnGlobe Corp., offering innovative soil treatment and site remediation technologies, enabling onsite rather than hauling solutions, including a patented process to remediate salt impacted sites; Douglas environmental, offering leading technologies for testing and treating air and water issues in commercial and residential buildings; DX3 Enterprises, who design and manufacture solar-powered LED lights that work in 40 below on the shortest days; GSS Integrated Energy, who focus on geothermal heating and electrical cogeneration systems and microgrid utilities.

I salute the Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce for encouraging innovative technology companies to work together. As Jerry Hanna, president of Clearflow, noted, Sherwood Park is really becoming an epicentre for new technology, and I believe more and more innovative ideas will develop out of our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

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

Premier's Travel Expense Repayment

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would everyone in this Assembly please join me in thanking and congratulating the Premier for repaying almost \$45,000 for money wasted on her trip to South Africa. [some applause] Come on, folks. You can do better than that. Will everyone please join me in congratulating the Premier. I guess this is what the Premier's definition of real-life leadership is. Frankly, I've seen more leadership, for example, from my niece after she gets in trouble, when she immediately – immediately – gives back her brother's toy.

So just to recap, first, the Premier denied knowing about the cost of the trip. Then she threw her staff under the bus. Then she said that she was disappointed. Then she apologized and in some bizarre world thought that that was being held accountable. This was a Premier backed into a corner and forced to cough up the cash. She didn't pay it back on principle. She didn't pay it back because it was the right thing to do. She paid it back because Albertans demanded it. She only paid it back to save her political skin. Albertans can't trust this Premier. Albertans can't believe a word she says.

Paying back the money for the South Africa trip is only the beginning. This Premier should pay back the money used to fly the government plane to pick her up from vacation in Palm Springs. She and her cabinet should pay back the money used to send the government plane to PC fundraisers over and over and over again.

Some courageous MLAs have spoken out. For the rest of the PC caucus, your continued support of the Premier is an affront to accountability and to all Albertans. Albertans deserve better from their leaders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Paralympic Winter Games Medallists

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to bring news to this House that Alberta athletes have won four medals in the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi, including Canada's first gold. I'm extremely proud to say that the medallists are from my constituency of Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Speaker, Brian McKeever took home gold on Monday morning in the visually-impaired men's 20-kilometre classic cross-country ski event and another gold yesterday morning in the men's cross-country skiing one-kilometre sprint. This brings to nine the number of gold medals won by this amazing athlete during his career. On Sunday morning he will try to make it 10. Brian's wins came with the help of two guides from Canmore, Erik Carleton and Graham Nishikawa, and his coach and big brother, Robin. Brian is one of the most accomplished athletes in the history of Paralympic sport and continues to be a shining example of the pursuit of excellence that defines what it means to be an Albertan.

On Saturday afternoon Mark Arendz won Canada's second medal when he won silver in the 7.5-kilometre biathlon, and he won a bronze Tuesday in the men's 12.5-kilometre standing biathlon. Mark is the reigning world champion in the 7.5-kilometre biathlon and was first overall in the 2012-13 World Cup standings.

Mr. Speaker, this government is extremely proud of our support of athletes. Whether it is making sure they have world-class training facilities like the Canmore Nordic Centre or helping them reach their dreams through grant funding like Podium Alberta, the government of Alberta is behind our athletes one hundred per cent.

Alberta is exceptionally proud of all of our Paralympic athletes. They inspire all of us and demonstrate the true meaning of courage. Good luck with the rest of the games to these great athletes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Notices of Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of Bill 6, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

Bill 203

Childhood Vision Assessment Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act.

Bill 203 would ensure that children of school age are set up for success by requiring a comprehensive vision assessment by grade 1. This could help reduce potential learning and behavioural difficulties that affect children with visual impairments. More than 25 per cent of school-age children have vision problems that can limit their potential in all aspects of learning. Thanks to the work of initiatives like the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, more children are getting their eyes examined. However, still, more than 80 per cent of children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam.

Mr. Speaker, you need to read to succeed, and Bill 203 is an important step to ensuring that children in our families and communities across Alberta have the tools to succeed in the classroom and in life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to file the following petition, signed by 4,903 citizens: we the undersigned petition you to "re-evaluate the communities of West Springs, Cougar Ridge, and Aspen Woods to ensure we get [the] much needed schools built within our communities." Now, because this petition is signed only by the supporters of the petition, I am filing it as a document with five copies under our Standing Order 37(3).

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. First, from Dallas Diamond, a Calgary resident whose father experienced very unfortunate care at the urgent care centre in south Calgary, resulting, she feels, in delays and may have resulted in his death. I will table that and the appropriate copies.

Another from Calgary, Honora Thubron, whose husband is in a long-term care setting there. She expresses fears of speaking out because she feels very strongly that the administration has already given her indication that they will not be comfortable with her criticisms being made public. She is advocating for higher staff ratios for seniors.

A third, Mr. Jim Miller from Calgary, who has spent approximately 15 years inspecting farm operations in B.C. and is

encouraging the minister of jobs and skills and the Premier herself to meet and talk about ways to improve the occupational health and safety for farm workers in Alberta.

The fourth is a familiar name to most people here. Mr. Harry Chase, who is a former Member of the Legislative Assembly, is writing a lengthy paper in response to the Minister of Human Services' request for suggestions to improve the child care and family care services here. He is advocating very strongly for a more family-centred and more transparent and respectful approach to families in distress.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards that the office of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards were collected among the thousands by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A. They are clear evidence the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary education system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there were no points of order today, so the Clerk will move to the next item of business.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Estate Administration Act

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

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act.

This bill continues the reform of succession laws in Alberta by taking steps to codify and modernize the existing common law governing the administration of estates. As a result, the role and responsibilities of a personal representative will be easily understood, and beneficiaries can be more assured that the wishes of the deceased are being followed.

There are a couple of questions that I would like to address before I close, and one is having to do with grants from the United

States. I would like to inform this House that Bill 4 does deal with grants from the U.S., but in that case the applicant applies for an ancillary grant under section 19. While resealing the foreign grants from Commonwealth countries is found in section 18, section 19 deals with ancillary grants, where the deceased was not a resident of a jurisdiction referred to in section 18. In other words, this allows for a process to deal with grants from the United States and in any country where the deceased resides.

There's another point of clarification regarding obligations and/or liabilities of the executor or administrator. The role and the responsibilities of the personal representative already exist in common law. Common law currently holds that a personal representative is a fiduciary. Bill 4 only codifies this and puts these responsibilities into plain, understandable language.

The bill also contains provisions that can assist a personal representative to reduce their risk of liability. These are not new but were carried forward from the prior legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident this legislation will benefit Albertans. Several of the changes contained in the bill were motivated by recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and both round-table and online consultations were conducted with Alberta's estate practitioners, the Canadian Bar Association, estate planners and advisers, and experts in estate administration. Their feedback showed wide-ranging support for our efforts. This support shows that the work of the government staff in doing the areas of succession law will serve Albertans well, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank the government staff who worked on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers on the bill, or is someone wishing to adjourn debate?

Ms Kubinec: I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not wanting to upset what is surely to be one of the quietest Thursdays on record and not wanting to miss one second of the spectacular Alberta day that's going on out there, I would like to move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 17.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 2:59 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to March 13, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft.), 146-54 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 184-87 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 217-18 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 226-28 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2014; SA 2014 cS-2.5]

2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 84 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 143 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 154-56 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 187-88 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c2]

3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)

First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 143-45 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 187 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c3]

4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 145-46 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 184 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 191-93 (Mar. 11, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 229 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 250 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., adjourned)

5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 119 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 174 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 188-90 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 218-20 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 228-29 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 230 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c1]

201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 ()

First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 123-34 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship)

202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act (Jablonski)

First Reading -- 249 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 17, 2014

Issue 9

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 17, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to renew our strength and to replenish our resolve that we may work as hard as we can to help those who entrusted us to represent them. May wisdom, patience, and civility guide our speech and our actions in this regard. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem as led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clark.

Thank you, members. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you have a visitor today?

Mr. Anderson: I do, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly somebody who's very well known in these parts, a gentleman that I'm sure many of us are friends with. Mr. Brent Rathgeber was a member of this Assembly from 2001 to 2004, representing Edmonton-Calder. He has had a successful legal career and is currently serving his second term as the Member of Parliament for Edmonton-St. Albert. It's great to see him back in the Legislature today. I invite Mr. Rathgeber to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us begin with school groups.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It really is a pleasure to rise today. You know, I've had the privilege of being an MLA for six years, but this is the first time since I became an MLA that a school group from my constituency has visited the Legislature. I am very pleased today to introduce the grade 6 class from Lycée Louis Pasteur, which is the school right across the street from my house, and it's a class of students that I've known since they were three years old. The reason for that is that this group of students have grown up with my daughter, Sarah, who is in this group today. They are up this week to attend the School at the Legislature. I will tell you that while we had many exciting discussions about politics last week, they have been truly excited about being here, being at the Legislature, and learning everything that they can. They're looking forward to the week very much. I'd like to ask them to stand along with their teacher and parent

chaperones Stephen Doubt, Franz Plangger, and Mme Reka Lhuillier to receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, did you have a second introduction as well?

Ms Redford: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I have two more introductions. One is with a group of people that are sitting in your gallery. It is my pleasure today to stand to introduce a great student leader, and that is Michelle Hoover. Michelle Hoover is a grade 12 student from Delia, Alberta. She was named the 2013 4-H Premier award winner for her outstanding dedication to 4-H in Alberta. We visited earlier today. She has been a 4-H member for nine years. She has certainly served in the organization in a number of different positions. She has been active in her community organizing student carnivals, being on the yearbook committee at her school. There are only two people on that committee right now, so her leadership is very important. Minister Olson and I had an opportunity to meet with her and her family earlier today. She is incredibly inspiring. The one question she asked me is: what are we doing as a government to ensure that young people go back to agriculture? We had a very good discussion about that. It's a great question. I am so glad along with everyone here to be able to recognize someone who is such a strong, publicly spirited leader. Congratulations, and good luck with whatever you decide to do next.

The Speaker: Thank you. Your final introduction, please.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the indulgence of the House. There is no doubt that there are many things that I've been very proud to do in this House, but this is my first opportunity in this House to introduce my daughter, Sarah Jermyn, who can stand, please. I think that there are an awful lot of things in our life that we think we are proud of, but there is nothing that I am prouder of in my life than being the mother of this incredible young lady, who is now, actually, officially taller than me and takes great pride in everything that we do as a family. Her father and I are so proud of her. She is my friend. She is my supporter. She is certainly my daughter. She gives me tremendous advice, is actively engaged in politics, in public policy on Facebook and on Twitter. I will say that there is nothing more important to me in the world. Every decision that I make, I make with her in mind. I would like her to rise again and have my love and know how much I love her. I can't say anything more. You're wonderful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's my pleasure to introduce 19 brilliant students from Norwood school in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and they are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Judith Brouwer and Miss Meagan Como. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a bright and enthusiastic group of 36 grade 6 students from Brookside elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. There is nothing more enjoyable in this job than having the opportunity to speak with grade 6 students. What

we do today is about tomorrow and the tomorrows after that, and it's about these kids. Having them come to the Legislature and having the opportunity to speak with them is what reminds us of the job that we are doing and what we are doing it for. Accompanying the students are their teachers, Jennifer Hill, Dee Panickar, Miss Hoffman, along with parent helpers Cindy Young, Helen Williams, and Karen Robinson. They are seated in both galleries. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other students to be introduced?

If not, then let us move on to the Associate Minister of Wellness, followed by the Associate Minister of IIR.

1:40

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a beautiful day in Alberta and an important month. March is kidney month, and it's an honour to introduce Flavia Robles, from the Kidney Foundation of Canada. I met with her just before question period, and she's a truly inspirational Albertan. Since its creation in 1964 the Kidney Foundation has helped millions of Canadians suffering from kidney failures and other related disorders such as hypertension, diabetes, urinary tract infections, and kidney stones, and it's done so by providing funding, innovative research, and education for kidney-related ailments. It's quite a number: 4,500 Canadians are on organ transplant waiting lists; 80 per cent of those are waiting for kidneys. For people who want to know more and want to help, please visit kidney.ab.ca. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the entire organization for all their dedication and ask Flavia to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary, an organization that helps facilitate a collective voice for 42 ethnocultural community groups in Calgary. They are concerned about the proposed change to Alberta's Human Rights Act and have travelled from Calgary to listen to discussions this evening on Motion 502. Joining us today are 21 individuals, including members of the ECC board and volunteers, eight members of the ethnocultural coalition of Edmonton, students from various institutions as well as representatives from a number of organizations, including Possibilities in Motion, from the Filipino community; Calgary Connecting Seniors Cultural Council; Men Action Network, the aboriginal community; Women's Centre, the aboriginal community; HIV Community Link, African community; Disability Action Hall; and the connecting elders from ethnocultural communities program. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a class of social work students from NorQuest College. They are accompanied by their class instructor, Dorothy Jacques. They represent the diversity of this great province and this great

country, young men and women from all walks of the world and all walks of life who want to make a better world, especially for our children and Alberta families. They're here today to express their desire for reforms to family and community support and the child-in-care system and support for Alberta social workers. They are the angels of society, and as representatives of the future front-line workers in the system I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my guests from the Alberta Students' Executive Council. ASEC is an advocacy organization representing the interests of almost 200,000 students across Alberta. My guests today are all student leaders at postsecondary institutions across the province, and they include: from the SAIT Students' Association, Kenneth Taylor; the president of the Grande Prairie Regional College Students' Association, my old alma mater, Lydia Sadiq; Martin Cruz, who's the president of the Students' Association of Red Deer College; Andrew Koning, who's the president of the Concordia Students' Association; Teresa Currie, the ASEC stakeholder relations co-ordinator; and Carol Neuman, the executive director of ASEC. I would like them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Airdrie.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly Kim Ergang and Jason de Vries. Both of these individuals are from my Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituency and own and operate Titan Towing. They are here today to raise awareness for tow truck operator safety on Alberta's roads and highways. It's about education and enforcement. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to both rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, I understand your guests are not here yet.

Let's go on to Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Brett Fawcett. Brett is a student at Concordia University and lives in Sherwood Park. He's active in politics at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. An avid reader, Brett's involvement in politics is motivated by reason and deep thought, something all members should take note of. Brett is seated in the gallery, and I'll ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When your children get married, you do not know if you're going to get any grandchildren. Fortunately, these three that I'm about to introduce have given Janice and I 10. From Salmon Arm, British Columbia, is Jennifer Henrie, a professional mother of five. Nathan Dorward, my son, is a professional accountant and works at Alberta

Pensions Services Corporation, a father of three. And young Spencer, who I think will help us to get maybe five or six more, is a professional accountant and works at a firm that I founded 20 years ago, Dorward & Company Chartered Accountants, a father of two. If they could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this Assembly it is my pleasure to rise today to introduce possibly two of my favourite constituents from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Now, I don't want to create any extra challenge for the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, but I do think that they may also be two of his cutest constituents as well. They are joined today by their mom, Tanya Cooper, and their dad, Nathan Cooper, who works very hard for us as Legislative affairs director in our caucus. I would ask Porter, aged six, and Paxton, aged five, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of representatives from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary. This group travelled to Edmonton via bus today to meet with me to express their concerns on Motion 502 and to listen to the debate in the House on the motion. My guests today are Thao Vu, Pol Ngeth, Jason Klinck, Len Chan, Henri Giroux, Saltanat Kermalieva, and Joe Espina. They are seated in both galleries, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Thomas Dang and Donald Ademaj. Thomas is a first-year student at the University of Alberta, studying computer science, and he's part of the Edmonton-Calder NDP constituency executive. Donald is a first-year student at the University of Alberta in science, and he also has a keen interest in Alberta politics, starting with his days as a page in this very Chamber two years ago. I would ask them both to stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Budget 2014

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak about a recent investment made to support Alberta municipalities. This government recognizes the essential role Alberta's communities play in fuelling our economy and making our province a great place for people to live. We know strategic funding for the province's municipalities contribute to building strong and vibrant communities. Budget 2014 demonstrates the Alberta government's continued investment in municipalities. This budget maintains the government's commitment to invest in families and communities as part of the building Alberta plan.

Mr. Speaker, this morning the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced further details to those budget commitments, which will help our communities thrive and grow to meet the needs of the people who proudly call Alberta home. Over the next three

years the Alberta government will invest \$5.1 billion in municipal infrastructure. This support will flow through programs such as MSI, GreenTRIP, Alberta community partnership, water for life strategy, and the municipal water and waste-water program.

There will be \$162 million more in support for transit over the next three years, and there will be \$150 million more available through MSI. Because public services aren't confined to municipal boundaries, the latest budget will enhance support for regional co-operation with \$20 million more. Our communities will also benefit from significant support through municipal police grants, family and community support services, and many other programs.

Altogether Budget 2014 provides more than \$2 billion in direct funding for municipalities across all ministries. You heard that: \$2 billion. Mr. Speaker, this is not simply about dollar figures. This translates into improved quality of life for Albertans. This is what we mean when we say that we are investing in families and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we start question period, please be reminded that you have up to 35 seconds for your question and up to 35 seconds for your answer, and I'll be strictly enforcing that today. Also, please, let's not have any preambles to supplementary questions after the fifth main question, which is held today by the ND opposition leader.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin, then – start the clock – with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the past few days have aired a lot of PC dirty laundry. We have a cabinet minister quitting today, saying that the PCs can't be fixed, and we have an MLA who quit the PC caucus last week because of what he described as bullying. This bullying was on full display on Friday when the minister supposedly responsible for ending bullying made a personal attack against her former colleague. Will any member of the cabinet defend the minister's bullying and dismissive comments?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bullying in any form is abhorrent, and we should all be setting good examples in that respect. Sometimes when a camera or a microphone is put in front of us and in the heat of the moment, you say things that come out the wrong way. I have been the perpetrator of that myself, for which I would like to apologize. The minister to whom the hon. member refers made some comments which were taken a bit out of context.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the minister's comments also dismissed electricians as somehow being less valuable than politicians. Now, I think that if you were to ask Albertans who they value more, electricians or PC cabinet ministers, the electricians would win hands down. I know that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, an electrician for 40 years, might agree with me. Our province is facing a major skilled labour shortage. What will the jobs minister do to ensure that his colleague's denigrating and

dismissive comments don't impact our efforts to attract skilled tradespeople?

Mr. Hancock: Two points, Mr. Speaker. First of all, no one is denigrating electricians. The Premier's father is an electrician. Many people are electricians, and tradespeople are represented in this caucus. That was not what the hon. member intended to do, nor should that be taken from her remarks.

What the hon. member said, if you look at the context of her remarks, was that it takes a different temperament to do this job. It was not a denigration of any other job and shouldn't be taken that way. The hon. member apologizes for that remark, and we should move on.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think that's what bullies say.

The antibullying minister must know that her comments were unacceptable and reflect the worst of what this government has come to represent, a bullying and intimidating group who is more concerned about entitlements than issues. The minister now lacks all credibility on the issue of ending bullying. Will the Premier give this important responsibility to another minister who will take the task of ending bullying seriously?

Ms Redford: The minister who's responsible for safe families and communities has certainly apologized for the remarks. It was very important. I made some comments this weekend saying that I think there were a lot of comments made last week that were not actually a very high watermark for political conduct in this province. I think when people's emotions do get the best of them, sometimes unfortunate things are said. The best we can do is to apologize and to move on.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Second main set of questions.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I've got another PC fundraiser to ask questions about today. During constituency break last year, on Thursday, May 2, the minister of tourism boarded a plane in Lloydminster. That plane first went to Drumheller, and then it arrived in Edmonton at 5:32 p.m., just in time for the Premier's \$500-a-plate fundraiser at the Shaw Conference Centre. The minister of tourism was photographed with her on stage. To the minister: what government business did he conduct in the 28 minutes before the PC Party fundraiser that required him to fly a government plane to Edmonton?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. leader for that question. On that particular date, if I have my dates correct, I was with the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations in Drumheller discussing a number of different initiatives in terms of our international strategy. At that point the plane returns to Edmonton, which is its home base. That's where I had to be later that day, so I don't see anything particularly unusual. In fact, I started that day in Edmonton assisting with an announcement with regard to our flights. If I'm not mistaken, it was the new direct link to New York City.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations was also on the flight to Edmonton. Now, we have no photos to show that he was at the PC fundraiser, too, but I don't want to assume the worst. In fact, I'd like to give him an opportunity to explain himself, too. So to the IIR minister: what government business did he conduct in Edmonton in the 28 minutes before the PC fundraiser?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister previous has responded. The planes are based out of Edmonton, so when the flights are terminating, it's actually good policy to have the planes come back to Edmonton, where their home base is, so they don't have to deadhead somewhere else.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, judging by these answers, it's apparent that there was no government business that evening in Edmonton. It's just as apparent that the only reason the two ministers boarded the government plane to come to Edmonton was to go to the PC Party fundraiser in Edmonton that night, another example of the taxpayer subsidizing the governing party. To the President of Treasury Board, who controls the air fleet: will he ask the PC Party to reimburse taxpayers for this expense?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as per the hon. member's question the government business wasn't in Edmonton; it was in Drumheller. The plane was coming back to Edmonton because that's where it's based. I'm not exactly sure why anybody would be reimbursing us for getting our own planes back to their own base.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader. Third and final main set of questions.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last week the Municipal Affairs minister committed to closing 90 per cent of the disaster recovery program claims in the next 17 days despite the fact that minimal progress has been made in the last nine months. I predicted it would be a mess. Well, it's even messier than I thought. When I asked the minister about this on Thursday, he stuck with the goal of 90 per cent of claims closed by the end of March. But then in a press conference on Friday the minister said that the 90 per cent goal would now be for the end of June. Will the minister clarify for Albertans desperately waiting for DRP news: what is the real target?

Mr. Hughes: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, this is a really important topic. I appreciate the hon. member's asking the question, and I'm delighted to share the details. There are actually two goals. The first one is that by the end of March the goal is to have 90 per cent of all eligible residential DRP applications completed. That's about 6,160 applications. That's 90 per cent of the eligible residential DRP applications at the end of January.

The second goal is to finish off 90 per cent of all of the rest of the . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Let me quote from the *High River Times*. "It's been nine months of confusion, woes and concerns with the beleaguered [disaster recovery program] . . . and now everything is allegedly smooth sailing . . . It's hard to believe until it actually occurs." Every flood-affected resident in Alberta who has had to deal with the disaster recovery program knows it is a mess. The next flood season is already here, Minister. It's flooding in Millarville today. How can Albertans have any confidence that this minister will fix things if he can't even get his story straight day after day?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, my position on this has been quite clear from day one. In December, when I was asked to take on this responsibility, over Christmas, I appointed a group to be the clearing house for those files that were caught in an insurance hold

as opposed to going forward into the DRP. Then we set the goal of having 90 per cent of all eligible residential files closed by the end of March and 90 per cent of all other eligible files closed by the end of June. So the message is quite clear.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the minister has been less than clear on this whole mess. Anyone sitting in the Chamber last week was left with the impression that LandLink was fired effective March 31. Then we heard about a transitional contract. Apparently, that transitional contract goes for another 90 days, and it will still not clear all of the files. To the minister: how is LandLink getting paid for this transitional contract, and how many further dollars intended for disaster relief are going to end up in their bank account?

2:00

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, you need to have somebody administer files. It's either officials of the government of Alberta, of which there are plenty working on this, or officials of the contractor from a contract that was established 20 years ago. It's quite clear that it would be exceedingly disruptive to stop the processing of files that are currently in the system at the end of March just because that's the end of a contract. We need a transitional contract in place in order to ensure that Albertans get the support that they need from the disaster recovery program. They are depending upon it.

Government Policies

Dr. Sherman: Happy St. Paddy's Day, Mr. Speaker. Let's be frank. If there was ever a day when the Premier needed the luck of the Irish, it would be today. After weeks of the Travelgate scandal and defections from caucus, the Premier has been placed on probation by her party. With over 90,000 children living in poverty, many suffering in government care, a crisis in health care access, and not enough schools or teachers for our kids, the Premier has been given a work plan at a time when the government no longer works for Albertans. To the Premier: how can you assure Albertans that your plans have their best interests at heart when your government is working so hard . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a very important season for Alberta. You'll know that in this Legislature right now we are debating a budget that is the first budget that's been back in the black in five years in Alberta. We know that in Alberta we are creating more than 75 per cent of the jobs that are created in Canada. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that this is the best place in the country to start a business. We've seen family income go up. We've seen revenues go up. We've made a \$10 billion investment in schools, roads, and hospitals. The future is bright, and that . . .

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, that budget was an over-under budget, where Albertans were overtaxed and underserved by their government.

The Premier likes to talk about the building Alberta plan. One former member of her caucus called it the bullying Alberta plan. Another former member called it the hurting Alberta plan. This government has slashed the seniors' drug plan by 25 per cent, waged war on workers' rights and public service pensions, and spent all our oil wealth in one generation. To the Premier: when will you stop your penny-wise and pound-foolish approach to governing and listen to Albertans who want you to realize that the

only cost they want you to cut is your government's extravagance?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in the last election Albertans said: we know that we live in a wonderful province, and we know we're lucky to live here, but what are we doing for the future? I'll tell you that the throne speech and the budget that we set out two weeks ago did that. It funded heritage scholarship funds. It put in place an endowment fund for access to the future. It added an endowment fund for agricultural innovation. It will create a new institute for innovation. That is economic diversification, economic growth, and investing in generations for years to come.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this province and this economy are great despite government policy, and that Speech from the Throne seemed more like a eulogy for a tired, old government.

Another part of the Premier's hurting Alberta plan has left public education severely underfunded. Her government scheme is to build trailer schools and cram as many students and as few teachers as possible into those schools. Alberta Liberals would make schools as community hubs. Teachers, trustees, parents, and students like the idea. To the Premier: why won't you listen to those very Albertans who won you your leadership and election campaigns and make schools as community hubs part of your work plan?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I think it's wonderful that the Alberta Liberal Party has adopted the Progressive Conservative education plan. You know, in the last three years we've had communities talking about the fact that schools matter and that schools need to be more than community hubs. In fact, our MLA for Calgary-Bow is working very closely right now with her constituents on exactly that initiative because this is what matters. What's great is that that's what school board trustees want, that's what parents want, that's what the Minister of Education wants, and that's what this Progressive Conservative caucus wants.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Government Effectiveness

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, the province has been transfixed by the drama engulfing the government party and caucus. While internal party affairs cannot be the subject of question period, the effectiveness of government certainly can. I regret having to ask this question, but it must be asked. To the Premier: do you have enough support to keep governing? [some applause]

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can do is thank the hon. member for his question.

Mr. Mason: Nice show of unity there, Tories.

The Premier says that she was given a work plan by the PC executive. If so, Albertans want to know how this plan will influence the actions of the government. To the Premier: will this work plan affect in any way what this government does or how they do it?

Ms Redford: In fact, I am very proud to be the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and to be the Premier of this province as a result of that. I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that every single day that we work as a caucus, we work to make things better for Albertans. That's what we do as members of the

Progressive Conservative Party, that's what we'll continue to do, and as we continue to work in alignment, that's what allows Alberta to continue to grow.

Mr. Mason: I think we should have another standing ovation, Mr. Speaker. I didn't get a count of all of the ones that stayed in their seats.

This PC government is clearly struggling to govern in the midst of its internal crisis. Sudden reversals by the Premier, snap funding announcements, and an idling legislative agenda are all evidence of paralysis in this government. To the Premier: given the impact of the PC crisis on your government, how will you ensure that the public's business gets done?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. member is talking about in terms of surprise funding announcements. What I'll tell you is that we presented a budget and a go-forward plan for this government, for this province. It's investing in schools; it's investing in hospitals; it's investing in shelters. Those are the announcements we're making today because those are the announcements that Albertans asked us to make to show that we were investing in the future. So if the hon. member is surprised by these, I'd suggest he reads the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Highway 881

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 2012 this government announced \$318 million to be earmarked for improvements to highway 881, including the construction of passing lanes, safety rest areas to accommodate oversized loads, and access to highway 69 for enhanced safety. In 2013 this project was deferred due to fiscal constraints. The government has announced this year that we have a balanced budget and that we have a much rosier financial outlook, yet the project has not been shown in the 2014 budget. To the Minister of Transportation: when will this project be brought back so that the construction. . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is working hard to twin highway 63, a road that parallels this road. We're spending almost a billion dollars on this project that twins this highway. Besides, we're finishing completing the ring roads around Edmonton and a major, substantial ring road in Calgary. This department is building Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the government's priorities are focused on market access and growing revenues, does the minister plan to achieve those objectives by investing in necessary infrastructure such as highway 881?

Mr. Drysdale: Of course, Mr. Speaker. I just listed some of the projects that we're investing in to help this province get our product to market. Highway 881 is an important link in infrastructure, but there are lots of important links in this province, and we'll work diligently to get them all done.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that there's an emerging consensus that an eastern bypass route across the Clearwater River will open up new oil sands opportunities, hence helping us grow revenues while reducing oversized loads and dangerous goods that travel every day through the middle of Fort McMurray, will the minister bring funding to the table to enable this to proceed?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we'll work with all municipalities to help that happen, and I'm sure this hon. member will agree that twinning highway 63 up there will help that progress along. The wide loads will have a better access with a twinned highway.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Bow.

Misericordia Community Hospital

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Misericordia community hospital in Edmonton is in dire shape: leaky pipes, downed elevators, and an intensive care unit that is only available based on the weather. When it rains, the place leaks and services shut down, patients lie on stretchers and gurneys in the halls, and even renovated bathrooms are not equipped to be barrier free. The Health minister acknowledges that the Misericordia needs to be replaced. In last week's budget nothing was presented in the capital plan to fix the Misericordia. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Why isn't it on the list?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm glad the hon. member is raising this again because it gives me another opportunity to tell the hon. member and all Albertans that we are committed to working with the Misericordia, with Covenant Health to complete critical infrastructure repairs. There is currently over \$19 million that has been allocated for these repairs. About \$6.2 million has already been spent on things like upgrades to elevators and the electrical system. We've asked Covenant Health for their estimate of what other funding will be needed over the next 3 to 5 years for this. . .

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Minister. Given that the Misericordia was slated for a rebuild or replacement six years ago and given that in 2010 AHS had a \$100.1 million approved budget for the Misericordia but placed the project on hold, can the Minister of Infrastructure explain why the project was deferred? Where is that money now?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member opposite is against us getting the best value for the infrastructure that exists in Alberta. I'm a little perplexed also. They don't seem to like the fact that we're spending \$19 million to keep it going and keep it in a good, safe condition for patients and Albertans so that we can continue to get the very best value for Albertans. On one hand, they say: don't spend so much money. On the other hand: it's a spending day; it's a spending day; it's a spending day. When they finally decide what they do want, we'd be happy to hear about it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, it's about patient safety. That was brought up six years ago.

Given that the Misericordia is now AHS's second most important new project and given that the costs have increased since the minister pulled the hundred million in approved funding, will the minister enlighten us on what the new costs are now to replace the Misericordia?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's be clear. Alberta Health Services has made a number of high-priority recommendations for renovation and replacement of aging hospitals in this province. The Misericordia is one of those hospitals. What the hon. member doesn't do, of course, today as part of her question is talk about the \$1.3 billion that was spent to build the South Health Campus facility in Calgary. As I've said, we are working together as ministries to determine the ongoing hospital capital infrastructure needs for Edmonton and the capital region, and a decision about a new facility . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

School Growth Pressures in Calgary

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary neighbourhoods of West Springs, Aspen Woods, and Cougar Ridge are in desperate need of a new school. Nearly 5,000 parents signed a petition, that I presented in the House last week, advocating for new schools in their neighbourhoods. So my first question is to the Minister of Education. Given the release of the Calgary board of education capital plan list today, putting the West Springs-Cougar Ridge middle school as the number one priority, can the minister tell these 5,000 parents and the House when we can expect an announcement regarding new schools in these neighbourhoods?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend this MLA for being such a great advocate for her community, first of all. She had a whole group of parents in the Legislature last week, and I was happy to meet with those as this MLA requested that, and we had a really good discussion. I know they've done a lot of good work, including lobbying to get this to number one on the CBE's list. Obviously, everyone knows that this government has invested a lot in schools over the last couple of months, I think 10 in Calgary in February and 10 in Calgary in the spring of 2013, but beyond that commitment we're going to look forward and try to get more and more schools on the capital list.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: given that parents have been told that their children cannot be registered in their local West Springs school this September because they cannot count on getting portables by then, would the minister please first confirm that he has approved these portables for this school?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, yeah, I can speak to that. Once again, because of this Premier, instead of having the budget to provide only about 40 portables a year, she's bumped this up so that we can have the budget to provide over a hundred portables a year because we recognize the growth pressures. This is one of the schools that's going to benefit from that. We know that we've got about 16 modules going to Calgary, and my understanding is that two of those are going to the area where she has requested.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. My final question is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Can the minister please confirm that these approved portables will arrive for the fall semester and be fully operational?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell the hon. member is that we have a contract with the supplier. [interjections] The contract specifies they're to be delivered in July and completed and ready for students in August because that's the time when we expect that students are going to be there because every September they show up.

So we have a plan. It's part of the building Alberta plan. [interjections] These portables are, as I said, part of that, and we expect them to be delivered and providing the services that Alberta parents and students need.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Please keep the noise level down. Let's go on.

Protection of Persons in Care

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, the latest protection of persons in care report paints an alarming picture. There were 166 complaints of abuse that were founded and involved vulnerable Albertans in care. But these are only the high-level numbers. Albertans don't know the real details. Each of these abuse cases was investigated, which means there are recommendations from each and every one. Again, those are not public. To the Health minister: how can you possibly learn from these horrific cases of abuse when you're concealing the recommendations to improve?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we discussed this issue last week, and as the hon. member knows and as I've said to the House many times, we take all of the complaints that are made under this act very, very seriously. It is true that in 2012-2013 there were 470 reports. A significant number of those were determined to be founded complaints. We're following up very closely on each one of those. As I said, I've directed my ministry to put in place a process to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

Mrs. Towle: You also delayed the report by nine months, Minister.

Given that the Health minister has shared these reports with the associate ministers and the ministers that are affected, one can assume, and given that those ministers are responsible to protect vulnerable Albertans in care, why has the Minister of Human Services or the associate minister of PDD not acted immediately on those reports and made the recommendations public?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the acting minister for the Minister of Human Services today nothing could be further from the truth. We discuss all of these reports in detail. Ministers, regardless of whether it's my ministry or the Ministry of Human Services, take the recommendations very seriously, and we will ensure and have ensured that those are implemented.

Mrs. Towle: It would be nice if Albertans could see those recommendations so they know where to put their people in care.

Given that the Protection for Persons in Care Act also applies to several individuals in the persons with developmental disabilities programs, what is the associate minister for PDD going to do to

ensure that those vulnerable Albertans who fall under his mandate are not subject to the same kind of abuse?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister for persons with developmental disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Abuse of any kind makes me sick to my stomach. We have taken recommendations from the PPI, and we will be recommending and we will be implementing all of them. It is unfortunate that incident happened. We take that very, very seriously. We are taking every single recommendation, and we will be implementing those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Athabasca River Water Quality

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. For years and years and years we've said that something is wrong in the Athabasca River, but the government continued to deny, deny, deny that millions of litres of toxic tailings yuck was and is leaking into the groundwater and then into the Athabasca River. The most recent Environment Canada report confirmed this. To the environment minister: why did the government repeatedly ignore calls to look into concerns that these leaks were affecting the environment, wildlife, and people's health?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you. I can say to you that we take very seriously all of our monitoring up in the oil sands area of the province and especially around Fort McMurray, Fort MacKay, and Fort Chipewyan. Mr. Speaker, I can stand and say to you that we are continuing to put more monitoring in place and we'll continue to do so, working with the federal government to make sure that we do a proper job monitoring now and into the future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: if the government was so concerned, why didn't it insist that directive 074 be fully implemented; that is, stop creating new tailings ponds and phase out, get rid of, the old ones as conditions for allowing more developmental permits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I say to you that we are working closely with industry, and industry is doing a very good job of putting money into technology and research to make sure that we don't have to develop tailings ponds in the future. I can say to you that I've had very good discussions with industry, and when our tailings ponds framework comes out, I have made it very clear to industry that we are going to expedite the cleanup of our tailings ponds.

2:20

Ms Blakeman: Oh, good grief. Not another directive thing.

Okay. To the same minister: how can the government ensure proper environmental data quality when CEMA and other environmental science based agencies are now dependent on funding from industry, especially when we've had the example of industry pulling their funding from CEMA not once but twice?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, industry hasn't pulled their funding from CEMA. As a matter of fact, they're committed to pay for CEMA this year and into next year. I can say to you that when we bring AEMERA into place, which is the Alberta monitoring agency, again, we will have good science. We are engaging with all of our scientists from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and from around this country to make sure that we get it right. I can say to you that we are committed to making sure we do a good job up in the oil sands region.

Drilling in Urban Areas

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, for years Albertans have watched this PC government bend over backwards to help industry make huge profits at the expense of the environment and community safety. Today 11,000 citizens of Lethbridge, just to name one city, delivered a petition calling on this government to help protect their homes, schools, playgrounds from harmful drilling. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when will you listen to the people of Alberta and their municipal leaders and stop allowing risky drilling in urban areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I want to say that we've been listening very, very carefully to our two MLAs from the area, to the mayor of the community as well, making sure that the environmental concerns from their communities are able to be addressed with me. I've talked to the mayor myself. We're going to meet. We're also looking at an urban drilling policy. We're working on that piece right now. What is important for me is the safety of Albertans, all Albertans.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that there are still no clear rules on drilling in urban areas and given that this PC government has been promising an urban drilling strategy since 2012, when Calgary faced the same threat that Lethbridge does today, to the Minister of Energy: when will we finally get to see this policy, and why has it taken so long?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy again.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we do have policies about drilling in this province, whether they be for urban or rural, and I have made a commitment to look at the policies, review the policies, and bring forward different stakeholders, municipalities and other stakeholders, so that we can look at those policies, first of all, so that everyone is aware what policies we do have in place. Whether we live in rural Alberta or we live in urban Alberta, it's important for all of us to have policies for safe drilling.

Mr. Bilous: Tick-tock, tick-tock, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that without this policy the government and regulators continue to make up rules on the fly in the backroom and given the strong opposition from Albertans, including in Lethbridge the mayor and city council, the chamber of commerce, and both school boards, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will the minister commit that changes to the Municipal Government Act will include a prohibition on drilling in urban areas, and if not, why not?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, again thank you for the question. What's important to note, Mr. Speaker, in this particular case is that there

has been no application put forward to the Alberta Energy Regulator, so the citizens are having the opportunity to bring their concerns first and foremost to their two outstanding MLAs – the mayor is able to talk with myself as well – and to be able to talk about those. But, quite frankly, there is no application before the regulator at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Cardston Hospital Renovation

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As AHS knows, the Cardston hospital has exceeded its best-by date. The main structure is over 60 years old, and it's been 33 years since the last renovations were done. As the minister may appreciate, since the doctors and the people of Cardston were told in 1999 that they were next in line to receive a new facility, the government's promises lack just a little bit of credibility. What will the minister do to reassure them that this critical new hospital will actually be built?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The Cardston hospital is one of a number of hospitals in Alberta that were built in that particular area that require renovation and in some cases replacement. I think the hon. member knows that this particular project is on the five-year list that Alberta Health Services has established. I recognize the importance of the facility to the community. That is where the project stands at present.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, in 1999 it was next in line, so being on the five-year list may not be as reassuring as we'd like it to be.

Given that Cardston is fortunate to have dedicated and skilled doctors, nurses, and support personnel to serve the thousands of people in the town and area as well as about 10,000 people on the largest First Nations reserve in Canada, will the minister tell us when Cardston will be getting this long-promised hospital?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure the hon. member appreciates, we are not living in the 1970s, in an era where in most of Canada and certainly in Alberta we sought to have full-service hospitals with all programs and services in every community across the province. Alberta Health Services is undertaking very detailed planning at the zone level now about what the roles of hospitals will be, and they will all play specialized roles in the future. As the hon. member knows, AHS has recognized the need for physical renovation of the facility and will continue to work toward putting the right project in . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're counting on that, of course, Mr. Minister.

While it seems to make sense that doctors and health care professionals in Cardston would be consulted and that their recommendations would actually be listened to, this hasn't been done so far. What will the minister do to make sure that this actually happens?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really actually grateful to the hon. member for raising this point. As I've said in this House before, we believe, I believe that there is a greater role that health advisory councils can play in this province in terms of long-term community planning for health infrastructure, providing feedback on services that are provided at the local level. What I am committed to do is to work with Alberta Health Services and those council members to expand their role, to provide them a greater voice in the kind of planning that the hon. member is talking about. I think that's very worth while.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Little Bow.

Municipal Charters

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing and hearing and hearing and hearing and the MLA for Edmonton-Centre has also been asking these kinds of questions surrounding the city charter framework agreement, but we haven't seen any details outside of conversations, in fact, in the media. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can't you at least release a framework of the agreement to the public?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have a very constructive engagement with the mayors of the two big cities in this province. They have a very positive approach to working together with the government of Alberta. I'm very pleased to say that we will be making good progress, and we're a matter of weeks away from demonstrating the progress that all of this good work has accumulated to date.

Mr. Dorward: Well, I'm happy to hear that we're weeks away now. What are the objectives of that agreement? Can you give us some more beef as to that, Minister?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act is also under review, and that's something that municipal officials and other stakeholders around the province are very interested in and are engaging in a very open process throughout the province this spring. That is not unrelated to the working relationship with the two large cities, you know, those cities that have more than three quarters of a million citizens, have greater capacity, have greater ability to do stuff, and have the opportunity to provide leadership for their own respective communities.

Mr. Dorward: Let's cut right to the chase. Can you speak to the concern that affects myself, in that people are talking about new taxation powers being given specifically to Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, it's clear the hon. member is an accountant, and I'm very pleased to have his question. All of us as citizens are focused on the fact that there really is only one taxpayer at the end of the day. This is not a conversation so much about new revenue sources. If there were any, I'd speculate about the need for possibly having a plebiscite about them, but there aren't necessarily any in the works. What we're really talking about is how we ensure that citizens get the services that they are entitled to and that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Bridge Maintenance and Repair

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Transportation has been looking after the local bridge funding program for many years and promised to build infrastructure in this province. They've now decided to pass the costs on to municipalities. Many of these bridges are 50 to 75 years old and need repairs. Downloading the cost to already overstretched municipalities is not fair and also places essential emergency services delivery at risk. Can the Minister of Transportation explain why his government is putting rural Albertans at risk by failing to maintain adequate levels of service for bridge funding?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank that member for a good policy question. A year ago we had to make some tough decisions in the budget and save some money, and unfortunately we zero-funded the strategic infrastructure program, which included the bridge funding for municipalities. Being a councillor from a rural municipality I know how important that program is. But we also increased funding to the basic . . .

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AAMD and C has called to increase funding "to a level that reflects the needs of the community, agricultural sector and local industry," why will this government not come back to the table, agree to a second round of meetings with the AAMD and C to ensure that rural Albertans are not put at risk by the deteriorating roads and infrastructure in our ridings?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I meet regularly with my colleagues at AAMD and C, and I know the pressures that they've come under. Over the past three years this province has set aside \$35 million each year, a total of \$105 million, for bridge maintenance and preservation on provincial highways, a vast majority of which are in rural ridings.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture: given that the recent grain transportation crisis in Alberta affects farmers' access to markets, with even a press release just hours ago promoting what the rail service should now do, is this minister concerned that his government's lack of commitment for essential road infrastructure will complicate more problems for agricultural producers getting their products to market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. Obviously, transportation is very important to agriculture. That's why we've been so active in recent weeks in our advocacy after listening to our producers. Roads are equally important. I have the ear of the Minister of Transportation. We talk regularly. We're also planning a meeting with the AAMD and C, hopefully this week. I would note, though, that the Auditor General's report just a year ago indicated that their finding was that our bridges were safe, so we're not talking about a safety issue. But we still are very . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: I'll try it again if you want.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. I was distracted. My apologies. Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Tow Truck Driver Safety

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's roads and highways are busy, and tow truck operators are often called in to assist with emergency situations, putting them in harm's way and at a dangerous risk of being struck by passing vehicles. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. Given that towing services often work in conjunction with law enforcement, ambulance, and fire crews, what safety measures are in place to ensure that they are protected from roadside incidents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. She always works hard on behalf of her constituents. The safety of motorists and first responders and tow truck drivers is always a top priority for my department. Tow trucks have amber flashing lights to signal to other motorists that they are stopped and working on a vehicle at the roadside and work site. At scenes shared with emergency responders, tow truck operators also have additional protection from emergency vehicles.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: given that tow truck drivers work in these high-risk situations, does your ministry see value in allowing these personnel to have red and blue flashing lights so that they can be better identified on Alberta's highways?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. Red and blue flashing lights identify emergency vehicles, and tow trucks are not considered emergency vehicles. It also should be noted that no other jurisdiction in Canada allows tow trucks to have red and blue flashing lights.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. These tow truck operators are not feeling safe, so if red and blue lights are not an option for them, what alternative mechanisms or initiatives could your ministry support to ensure overall driver safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important for tow truck operators to take necessary steps to ensure that their work sites are safe. Part 12 of the occupational health and safety code outlines how signs, lights, barriers, traffic cones, et cetera, should be in place to assist in providing a safer environment for tow truck operators to work. As we continue building Alberta, safety on all work sites and on all provincial highways will be integral.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Continuity in Health Care

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The story of Greg Price is tragic. It was told in vivid detail in December's Health Quality Council report. Greg died two years ago at the age of 31 of testicular cancer. It's tragic because the barriers that Greg faced while trying to access health care were well known by this government. The report notes six surveys over 10 years, each identifying the same fundamental problem, a systematic breakdown in communication. The breakdown prevented Greg from receiving timely care. To the minister. Greg's story is not unique, and it's not new. Why, after a decade of knowing . . .

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really want to thank the hon. member for the question. The story of that young gentleman is indeed very tragic. However, as the hon. member knows, the primary conclusion of the report was not only that there was a failure of communication but that there was a failure at several junctures in the course of Greg's care of physicians to communicate and share information regarding that patient. As a result of that report, we have begun work with the College of Physicians & Surgeons and other health professionals to determine what can be done to ensure that those breakdowns don't occur.

The Speaker: Supplemental, please.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Given that a priority in the 2010 five-year health action plan is now also a recommendation in the report following Greg's tragic death and given that the recommendation was to create an e-referral system connected to Netcare that would standardize the referral process, can the minister explain why Albertans are continuing to wait for this government to follow through on a four-year-old promise?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was certainly one of the recommendations, and we are looking at the e-referral system in conjunction with Alberta Health Services. But the primary conclusion of the report is something that I think all of us can benefit from reflecting upon, and that is: first and foremost, physicians have responsibility and accountability for the care that they provide to patients. That includes, as the report demonstrates, communication that occurs when the patient is with the physician and when the patient is referred to another physician.

The Speaker: Hon. member, final sup.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That leads into my next question. Given that the report spoke of doctors not being informed about patient care in emergency, not being informed about care their patients received from specialists, and not being informed about the patients' diagnostic tests or their results, how can Albertans needing health care today be assured that they won't fall through the same cracks as Greg did?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, what patients can rely on is the fact that this government and, I believe, physicians as a community in this province recognize that there is a great deal to be learned from this report. Again, the primary recommendations are around the accountability of physicians for the care that they provide to patients, both the care that they provide directly and the responsibility to share information when they make referrals to other physicians and, when they receive results of tests, to share those with other physicians as well. That is the learning from this very important report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Smoky River Bridge Removal

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of years ago an abandoned railway bridge in my constituency that crossed the Smoky River near Watino gave way during demolition, leaving a large part of this bridge in the river, where it poses a safety threat to navigation. It's been stated that the CNR was the owner of the bridge and, therefore, responsible for the cost of the removal of this bridge from the Smoky River, that the removal would take place by the end of last summer, and that compliance action would be taken if it became necessary. My first question is to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that I share the member's view about the importance of safety on our rivers and especially the Smoky River. We've been working with CN Rail and their contractor in getting the bridge removed from the river. I can tell you that the contractor tried to remove the bridge this summer and this fall but was unable to do so safely. I'm told that as soon as the spring runoff is done and the ice is gone, they'll try to remove the bridge again.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will you consider taking a compliance action under the Water Act and/or the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to ensure that this work is done as soon as possible?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, CN Rail and the contractor have been working in good faith. I will say to you that if this does change, we will look at enforcement action.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can a deadline be imposed on CNR to ensure the removal of the bridge in a timely manner?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I do share the member's concern, but it's also important that when we do remove the bridge, we do so in a very safe manner. My department will continue to work with CN and the contractor, and we'll ensure that the bridge is removed from the Smoky River sooner rather than later. The company and contractor will try again this spring, as I said, to remove the bridge. It is my hope that they will be successful this time around.

2:40 Education Performance Measures

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, there's been a great deal of hyperbole and debate surrounding the merits of discovery math. I think that what is needed is a balance, and Alberta teachers know how to teach our students and implement a wide variety of individualized learning techniques. What needs to be remembered is that curriculum is one thing; teaching children is another. So whether we're talking about old math or new math, what is clear to me is that teachers need to be empowered. To the Minister of Education: regardless of what your curriculum states, how do you expect teachers to be able to support student learning with 25, 30, or even 40 kids in the classroom?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think we've said repeatedly that, you know, we recognize that the size of the class is an important

factor in success, but it's not the only important factor, and it's not the most important factor. Certainly, we know that the younger grades benefit more greatly from investment in smaller class sizes, which is why that's one of the areas of the Education budget that's steadily been increased. So we do agree with the member that we want to invest in those areas, and we do invest in those areas, but it's not the only solution in terms of getting success for our students.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the numbers don't lie. Despite adding 48,000 more students from four years ago, only 106 new teachers have been hired. Keeping the same ratio to students from four years ago, we would have 3,200 more teachers in our classrooms. Instead, we have kids crammed in classrooms with fewer teachers per capita. Clearly, the minister must admit that this is not good for kids.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the hon. member gets his stats from. I'd be quite happy to look at those and look into those more deeply, but the reality is that in Alberta we don't track how many teachers we have in the classrooms. It's probably something that we should do, and maybe that's one thing that will come back from the regulatory review committee; that is, requiring school boards to readily report, to more transparently report how many teachers they actually have doing instruction. Many teachers are involved, as you know, in administration; some are involved in research and other pieces. Those pieces of the budget are areas of the budget that were decreased, not the areas where we're investing in the classroom. We increased the budget in the classroom. We decreased the budgets in transportation and research.

Mr. Hehr: Well, those are some pretty big numbers, so we'll concentrate on some easy ones, the number 50. We know your government promised 50 new schools in the last election. To date you guys have not started building them. Will you just come clean with the Alberta public that none of these 50 new schools will be built by the next election?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always encouraging to see another member from the opposition excited about the building Alberta plan that we're putting in place under the Premier. Last week we heard a member anxious about having a shovel in their hand, and perhaps this hon. member wants a shovel in his hand as well.

As I have said in the past, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. The first part of building a school, interestingly enough, isn't putting the shovel in the ground. It's putting the planning in place, deciding where it is, working with the school boards, getting the programming in place. We're doing that, and we intend to have those schools in place, 50 and 70, in 2016.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The time for question period has elapsed. Thank you, hon. members, for sticking to the 35-second rule, which was strictly enforced today, as a result of which 18 main questions were asked for a total of 108 questions and answers, a record. I did receive a couple of notes from a couple of members questioning the timing. I will check the log because we keep strict track of all this and just see if our timers were bang on or if they erred by a second or two. I don't think they did, but I will check it and let you know tomorrow.

In the meantime let's take a 30-second break, and then we'll move on.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us begin, then. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Bassano Continuing Care Centre

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Newell Foundation for their hard work in developing a strategy to address the serious need for aging-in-care spaces and developing a comprehensive continuing care framework.

In 2010 it was identified that there were 975 individuals waiting for placement in the community. This project will ensure that the Bassano health centre and its service region, which is three times larger than the town, are properly cared for. The Bassano continuing care centre's intent is to integrate independent living, supportive living, long-term care, primary care, and acute care into a fully functional design that supports a variety of community amenities. The integration of these resources will enhance the financial and building design efficiencies. This model will set the stage as a best-practice demonstration project for future rural facilities.

For the less-intensive dedicated care areas such as resident rooms, health care could be overlaid in a home environment, with AHS providing health services where the resident lives within the facility as much as possible. The health staff would be funded and employed by AHS but have the ability to flex the location of care as needed and as appropriate within the facility. Designed around a crossgenerational model, the centre offers a complete continuum of care and wellness for both young and old.

With the land transfer from the town to the foundation now being finalized, the only step left before breaking ground is to sign a service contract with AHS. I trust the minister shares my gratitude of everyone involved and sees how local decision-making can provide the services communities need.

I'm hopeful that the minister will ensure that AHS makes this project a priority so that seniors across Alberta get the quality health care services they deserve.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Calgary-Cross.

4-H Premier's Award Winner

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to again recognize the 2013 4-H Premier's award winner, Michelle Hoover. Ms Hoover was named the 2013 4-H Premier's award winner for her outstanding and commendable dedication to the organization. She was chosen from amongst the province's top members, who are helping to shape the future of rural Alberta through dedication to their communities. Ms Hoover is an eight-year member of the Delia 4-H Beef Club. She has held various executive positions in her club and district, participated enthusiastically in her beef project, and excelled in her public speaking.

Aside from her 4-H activities Ms Hoover takes giving back to her community to heart through her various volunteer activities. As the 4-H Premier's award recipient Ms Hoover has also been a role model over the past year for other 4-H members by attending events and speaking engagements across our province. 4-H members pledge their heads to clearer thinking, their hearts to greater loyalty, their hands to larger service, and their health to

better living for their club, their community, and their country, and Ms Hoover is a great example of these qualities and actions.

Mr. Speaker, 4-H has been a cornerstone in Alberta's agricultural history since its inception in 1917. While 4-H strengthens our ties to agriculture, it also teaches our youth important qualities that can be applied to all aspects of our lives, such as leadership, loyalty, and commitment. With the dedication and innovation exhibited by 4-H youth like Ms Hoover, I can say without a doubt that the future is looking very bright indeed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Greer Black

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to pay tribute to an extraordinary Albertan. Greer Black has had a distinguished 35-year career in health care. He's been an outstanding president and chief executive officer for the Bethany Care Society for over 22 years, and he has been a long-time friend of mine. Greer recently announced that he will be retiring on March 28. He is a strong advocate for seniors and persons with disabilities. Greer ensured that they could live independently with grace and with dignity.

The Bethany Care Society, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is a faith-based, voluntary, not-for-profit organization dedicated to building relationships with the residents and clients they serve. Greer pioneered the way as his strong, steady hands created excellent programs in health, housing, and support services for over 6,500 Bethany clients. His clear vision and guidance created state-of-the-art continuing care facilities, affordable apartments, and community services. Many boards and organizations have benefited from Greer's wisdom and his expertise.

Greer was recently asked, Mr. Speaker, what his greatest success has been, and he stated:

I believe that our challenge has also been our success; I believe that creating a strong, distinctive culture within Bethany has been successful. Bethany's reputation within the province and within the communities we serve . . . has shown that the work done by many to create caring communities has worked. Our integration of spirituality is an integral part of resident care.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to Greer for his strong legacy. He did make a difference in the lives of countless seniors and their families. I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in wishing Greer all the very best in his retirement.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

2:50

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to highlight a few of the many positive projects and funding announcements made in recent weeks. Alberta's population is rapidly expanding, and this growth would not be possible without a robust economy, high quality of life, and support for citizens who need it the most. Alberta is a great place to live and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, our government has committed to projects which are integral in sustaining this growth while ensuring that our future generations have the tools necessary to sustain our success. Last week we announced \$600 million to continue the city of Edmonton's LRT project. Also last week we announced that we

will invest \$30 million into Grant MacEwan University through the building Alberta plan to achieve their dream of a single, sustainable downtown campus. Simply put, we are building now to ensure that our future is even brighter than today.

However, it is not only massive infrastructure projects and university campuses receiving the support and funding of this government. In a place of immense prosperity and success it's important to take care of the most vulnerable citizens as well. This government has increased the funding to at-risk children and youth, increased funding to persons with disabilities, and continues to invest in homeless support programs. Furthermore, over \$350 million has been budgeted for Alberta seniors benefits to ensure that those who have given us so much can be taken care of.

I'm very proud of this government, the work that they have done. We are not even done serving today, and we will make sure that we continue our prosperity and serve our future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Craft Breweries

Mr. Hehr: As today is St. Patrick's Day and Albertans, as we know, are apt to imbibe on this day and occasionally on other days as well, I'd like to make a humble request. It's quite simple, really, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to see the government do more to support the development of a thriving and vibrant craft brewing and distillery industry in Alberta. According to Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission 76 per cent of Albertans consume alcohol. Note to the government: that is a large constituency that it would do well to keep happy.

The new liquor manufacturing policies announced in early December were a good start after years of stagnation, but arguably much still needs to be done and can be done to bring us on par with the likes of other Canadian jurisdictions such as Ontario, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia. The province's focus for many years now has been on ensuring tremendous product choice in beer, wine, and spirits. However, far too often those products have come from other provinces and countries. There is a thirst out there, Mr. Speaker, for greater access to Alberta-made liquor products and craft beer in particular. We lag woefully behind other jurisdictions in this regard, which is incredibly ironic given this government's alleged support of Alberta entrepreneurs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what we've actually been very good at is supporting the brewing and distillery industries in other provinces and the United States. Our small-brewer tax program, for example, continues to subsidize brewing jobs in the United States and elsewhere. This is a situation that urgently needs to be rectified, and it's one that the government promised to review.

We also need to revisit the volume limits placed on our mid-sized brewers. I'd really like to know what is happening on this front, as I'm sure is also the case for Alberta's small brewers. I'd also really like to encourage the government to continue looking at ways to liberalize the province's archaic liquor laws. I think allowing Alberta's small brewers and microdistillers to sell their wares at local . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 204
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
(MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver)
Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to introduce for first reading Bill 204, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014.

Implementation of this bill will further the accessibility of public information for all Albertans through all 87 MLAs' ability to conduct four free freedom of information requests annually. These four FOIPs will be done with the Privacy Commissioner's oversight and approval. Annually it will be disclosed which MLAs did which freedom of information requests and at what costs. Essentially, it will be free for each MLA to do four freedom of information requests a year.

I was amazed to discover after being first elected that the costs and waiting times for reimbursement for doing our work were actually slowing us down. This was slowing us down from ensuring that Alberta citizens' and taxpayers' funds were being well spent. Can you imagine the lack of transparency and accountability that many Albertans, nonprofits, and organizations may be prevented from discovering because of their budget constraints?

This bill will encourage Albertans to work with any MLA to increase government accountability and transparency. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate on this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling here of the five requisite copies of a resolution from the AAMD and C for the local bridge program to come back. It's costing municipalities over \$50 million a year. That's what they're short right now. There's a \$22 million shortfall for that. I'll table these.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the required number of copies for this tabling. It's with regard to the Bassano continuing care centre. It's the October 11, 2013, final report. It's what my member's statement today was about, and I would like to present them.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish I didn't read so much. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two documents that I referenced during a question last week on legal aid. The first is produced by the Canadian Bar Association. It's called Reaching Equal Justice Report: An Invitation to Envision and Act, Equal Justice: Balancing the Scales. That's the first one.

The second one is also published by the Canadian Bar Association, and it's called Moving Forward on Legal Aid:

Research on Needs and Innovative Approaches. This one was prepared on June 2010. I missed the date on the other one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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. Mr. Hughes, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the Safety Codes Council annual report 2012; pursuant to the Government Organization Act the 2011-2012 authorized accredited agency summary, the 2012-13 Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report, the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2013.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Insurance Act the Automobile Insurance Rate Board 2013 annual report for the year ended December 31, 2013.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

We had no points of order today, I'm happy to report, so we can move on.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 202

Independent Budget Officer Act

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province is a wonderful place to live and raise a family. It's the economic engine of Canada, with low unemployment and low taxes, but for all the province's wealth, with the government's budgets we're often left scratching our heads. The budgets used to be straightforward, so anyone could understand how the tax dollars were used. Now that's just not the case.

When I entered public office, we had a Premier who walked the walk on accountability, openness, and transparency. His name was Ralph Klein. Under his leadership Alberta balanced its budgets and did so with comprehensive budgets that everyone could understand. Not even the Auditor General can understand our province's budget, and this, quite frankly, needs to change.

3:00

Under Ralph's leadership we had the Deficit Elimination Act. We also added some of our surpluses to the sustainability fund. Now we don't have the Deficit Elimination Act, and the sustainability fund has been drained. This is not what the Premier told us when she ran to be the leader of her party or this province. Then she used to say: "Debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments. Debt has proven the death of countless dreams." Now she says that debt is hope. Quite frankly, what are Albertans to think?

To remedy this situation, I've put forward the Independent Budget Officer Act. This act will create a provincial budget officer that will be an independent officer of the Legislature. The office would provide independent analysis of the government revenues and expenditures. It would not be like the Auditor General, which

examines how money is spent. It would not do policies, programs, or decisions made – this would still be the role of the Legislature – but the PBO would be a source of unbiased information about the government's revenues and expenditures.

A provincial budget officer is necessary because the government's budgets and its assumptions are at times questionable. The key numbers have been politicized. Going into the last election, the Premier tabled what many called the Cinderella budget. The picture painted was so rosy that it must have been a fairy tale. By the time the next budget was tabled, we had moved from a fairy tale, quite frankly, to a nightmare.

Then there was a term no one had ever heard: the bitumen bubble. I say that no one had ever heard of it because we asked Finance and Treasury Board through FOIP about the term. They had no record of it, but I'll bet that if you FOIPed the Premier's office or the Public Affairs Bureau, you'd find all sorts of records. They probably focus tested that, too.

Albertans deserve better than this situation, Mr. Speaker. They deserve real accountability, and they deserve transparency. We've seen this government take some positive steps on expenses as well as salary disclosures. The government likes to talk about all the gold standards it has set, but to me it seems more like fool's gold. The expense gambles haven't stopped. They've continued, and they're getting worse. More troubling is that it always seems to start at the top.

The government loves travelling in first class and billing taxpayers for fancy hotels, but they're shocked when it's pointed out to them. They say that they'll look into it or that they didn't know about it or "How could that happen?" or that it's the staff's fault or that the policy is unclear. This government created the policies less than two years ago. It's their fault. They're out of touch with responsible spending, and they only look into their bad behaviour when the opposition points it out.

This is not a new idea, Mr. Speaker. Ontario is setting up a PBO. The government of Canada has one. Every state in the United States has one, too. It would be simple to set up. The staff that currently works at Finance and Treasury Board would run the PBO. It would be a source of statistics, indicators, and forecasts that the government would use as well as the public. It would be a public asset, not a political asset.

I can tell you right now that our colleges and universities wish for trustworthy budgets. Imagine how professors and students feel after the last few budgets. They believed that the 2012 budget would show that everything was rosy. Nothing to worry about then. Then Budget 2013 was tabled, and now they really have to worry. A planned increase turned into a forced cut. They had the rug pulled out from under them. They had no time to plan for the budgets that they were being handed. Many were laid off. Programs were cut. That was the same situation for those in the PDD programs. Cuts were made that totally blindsided everyone. Vulnerable people in our province deserve better. The great people who run our vital programs need predictability. They deserve better.

Another part of my bill would allow any MLA or committee to request an independent cost analysis of program spending. A major issue my constituents have struggled with is the government's promise to renovate and build new schools. It appears they've made a promise that they just can't keep with respect to 70 modernizations and 50 new schools. This government has stubbornly insisted that it can build every one they promised even though builders aren't bidding on the P3s to make them.

What the government has been great at is building signs. We can trust that as soon as someone had an idea for a building, the sign would be built for thousands of dollars. What we can't trust is

the government's ability to follow through. Their numbers can't be trusted. Their budgets can't be trusted.

To avoid further politicization of the budget numbers, my bill would not allow past MLAs to hold a provincial budget office. We've seen too many government offices become politicized, independent or not. If you want to be seen as impartial and beyond reproach, you have to step back from political life. Judges know this. So do other people in the public sector. But the government doesn't seem to care. It seems like they're against it. They want people they can trust, not the public. The word "independent" means free from outside control, but with the government, that is not what they want. They like control. They appoint boards like AHS, but when they don't do what they want, they fire them. They don't like independence; they like dependence. They need to change. We need officers of this Legislature, that are free from government control, to do what's best for Albertans. I think an independent provincial budget officer is exactly what Albertans want and what Albertans need.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when Albertans are asking their elected members to act first and foremost on their behalf, not on behalf of the government or the governing party but to have the wishes of their constituents in mind, this bill provides a great opportunity for that. An independent budget officer would allow members to better represent those who elect them. They would be able to provide their constituents with timely, accurate, and factual information about the state of the province's finances, information free from spin and free from partisan language.

Albertans don't want talking points. They want to know the truth. I'm going to encourage every member of the Assembly to reflect on what they hear today and to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hon. member is bringing forward something that on the surface sounds like something that everyone should jump behind.

I want to read something, Mr. Speaker.

As an independent legislative... office, our work [would assist] the Legislative Assembly, and in particular... Public Accounts [and MLAs], in holding the government accountable... provide opinions on whether the consolidated financial statements of the province, and the financial statements of every ministry, department, fund and provincial agency, are presented appropriately.

That sounds pretty good.

They would audit the financial statements and the performance measures to ensure that the performance measures are actually dealing with what we said we would be doing in terms of the objectives and that those performance measures in that audit would actually lead to recommendations to the government that are public and reportable back to this House. Mr. Speaker, these recommendations would be "to improve performance reports and the processes the government follows to produce them." An important part of that mandate should be "to examine and report on the government's management control systems."

Many of the concerns the hon. member has just raised based on the concerns that she has, amongst a whole raft of others, Mr. Speaker, this proposed office would not deal with because they're political and they're ideological from the opposition's perspective. And rightly so. They should have that opportunity. They should have the opportunity to tear the budget apart and report back to the constituents on what they like, what they don't like, what they think is right, what they think is wrong, and we encourage them to

do that. We're about to go through a very onerous and long process. Every department is going to go through that. In fact, tonight we're going to have three hours on one department alone where the opposition is going to be able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says that no one understands the budget that we presented, yet I've been across the province talking to chambers, rotary clubs, individuals. I'll be talking to councillors and municipalities tomorrow. Nobody has said to me that they don't understand the budget except the opposition and one other group that is looking for subscriptions and headlines.

Mr. Speaker, I digress a little bit because what I was talking about was a mandate. The hon. member was talking about the mandate of the office. What I just read to you sounds awfully similar to the mandate that is in the proposed budget office, too. The mandate I just read you is actually the Auditor General's mandate. Why would we create an office that does the same thing that the Auditor General's office is mandated to do? The Auditor General is not political. He provides unbiased opportunities for them to take shots at if they wish. He does the recommendations. In fact, he does a lot of recommendations every year.

In fact, we also have an audit committee made up of individuals from the private sector who look over the reports that the Auditor General does and the reports that the government does. That audit committee also has mandates that are similar to what the hon. member talks about with the independent budget officer. Frankly, some of what's in this independent budget office are things that opposition MLAs should be doing as part of their job, but I wouldn't go down that road.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the other piece is that it's unclear the extent of what the budget offices in other jurisdictions do. I mean, we've done a little bit of work on this because one of the chambers of commerce in the province actually recommended we do this, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. I've had a lot of discussions with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce about what the opportunity might be to look at other ways that we can have vetting, if you will, of the forecast. The hon. member talks about the forecast in her question. I readily agree. In fact, I seem to recall that during my Budget Address in this House I made the comment that the day that we put the forecast, that we had to print, it was probably going to be wrong, and everybody across the House was going to be critical of it. It is amazing that that prediction has come true. That forecast was entirely accurate.

What is difficult, Mr. Speaker, and what no independent budget officer would be able to do either is to predict what the Canadian dollar is going to be three months from now, to predict what oil is going to be six months from now. The hon. member talks about the bitumen bubble. In fact, the press came up with the bitumen bubble. The industry is the one that told us the differential was going to rise based on a glut of production heading into the Bakken that had nowhere to go.

Mr. Speaker, forecasting is a very complicated situation in our province. It's not the same as in other provinces, although this year we did actually do something that B.C. does. They brought in a group of independent forecasters and economists. They do this on a regular basis. They bring them in every year, and they provide the Minister of Finance with recommendations. They also look at the assumptions that are going to be put into the budget and give an indication as to whether or not they think they're in line with where their forecasts are. We had two forecasting summits last year. We brought experts from across Canada, even North America, to talk about forecasting. Those are the forecasts that are in this budget.

I have in my hands, actually, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce budget presentations. I heard the hon. member on some of the media this morning talking about: well, if the chambers of commerce support the budget, which they do, and the chambers of commerce support the format of the budget, which they do, and the chambers of commerce support the fact that the calculation of our consolidated surplus is \$1.1 billion, similar to what the federal government does their calculation on and the same way that Premier Klein used to calculate the surplus deficit number – they all agree with this. [interjection] In fact, it is true, hon. member. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is trying to change the rules of accounting, which is rather interesting given that he's the critic.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has not given us an unqualified statement. He's actually said that our financial statements do reflect the true picture of Alberta's finances. It's different, I might say, than what is happening in Saskatchewan, as an example.

Anyway, I have in my hands – and I think that these have been tabled in the House previously; if not, I will get the requisite number of copies at the appropriate opportunity – from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce their submissions to me both from last year and this year in terms of the budget recommendations. If you were to review through here, you would actually find that there is a lot of support for how we're doing the savings plan, operating plan, capital plan. There's a lot of support for what we're doing in terms of how we're going to build capital. There are a lot of very good suggestions, some of which were included in Budget 2013, some of which were included, actually, in Budget 2014. Nowhere in these two documents, Mr. Speaker, does the Alberta Chambers of Commerce call for an independent budget officer.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce did talk about the creation of a provincial budget office, and I'm actually talking to them about the why. Why are they looking for this? We were having some very good discussions about what they perceived to be a change in how we were doing our accounting and what is the actual fact. It's unfortunate that other forces, if you will, are trying to cloud the issue of what is the public-sector accounting for its principles because they have not changed. The public-sector accounting principles which this province, this government, follows are the same as the principles that are followed in British Columbia. They're the same as the principles that are followed by the federal government. They haven't changed.

Mr. Speaker, what I see here is a political attempt to try to do something to, I guess, add to their political – you know, they talk about how this would be unbiased, but in actual fact the whole reason they're bringing it in is for political gain. This is a duplication of what is an officer of this Legislature already. This would be an added expense. This would be an added process in terms of cost for the taxpayers of Alberta. The government is the one that presents the budget, not an independent person that's been appointed. The government is the one that decides on the priorities of where we're going to be putting our expenditures and where we're going to be investing for the future of Albertans.

I'm just not exactly sure to what extent an independent budget officer would benefit taxpayers or the budget process, Mr. Speaker, because many of the concerns they've raised, they've raised in this House before. They talk about, you know, the fact that we have made a conscious choice to use the capital markets to build the infrastructure that Albertans need today and into the future. We have not made the choice that the opposition leader has made, which is to defer capital and not build that capital, which is not what Albertans told us to do. They told us to build it today.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that we made the conscious choice to utilize our 50-year lows in interest rates and amortize that over the life of the assets. Frankly, the chambers of commerce agree with that. The financial administrators and planners in this province agree with that. Anyone who has done any type of economics or financial planning or ran a business agrees that you use all the levers at hand to accomplish the tasks you need. Right now, with 105,000 people moving into our province last year, we need infrastructure, and every municipality will agree to that. In fact, every municipality is also doing what we're doing.

Thank you. I will not support this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Edmonton-Centre, then, presumably, a government member, and then Edmonton-Calder or Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Provincial Treasurer, tsk, tsk, tsk. Now who's getting political on whose time?

I've had the great honour, Mr. Speaker, of being here for 18 budget presentations and 19 Public Accounts years. As the Provincial Treasurer well knows, an Auditor General examines past accounts, and a budget officer looks at forward accounts, at the budget, which comes at the front end of the planning process. I'm sure he knows that – I hope he knows that – because he is the Treasurer. There; I just solved that one for you. It was pretty simple.

But what I notice in the budgets that have been presented – and I've mentioned this a number of times during debates on supplementary supplies and interim supplies and budget debates, and I've had a number of hon. colleagues opposite agree with me. The budgets that this government puts forward are harder and harder and harder to understand, to know where the money is coming from and where it's going. The whole transparency is about as clear as a black plastic bag, being able to see what the government intends and how things are going to proceed.

Let me give you just a few examples of that. We end up with the government announcing the same project over and over and over and over again. You think: "I'm pretty sure I heard that. That school was announced or that – oh, wait – children's mental health program. Three of those I've heard announced, at least three." Then you're thinking: "Well, let me go look at the budget. Were there three of them in there or only one of them in there?" That's very hard to tell.

I used to look at budgets that had votes and under that subvotes and under that program votes, so you could actually tell what the programs were that the government was running. You would have vote 11, and it would say: environmental monitoring. Then under that you'd have 11.1, and it would give you more of a breakdown on how we were monitoring the environment, let's say by, you know, soil or air, land, and water. Under each of those there would be a further breakdown that would tell you what programs they were actually running. No, no, no. Not that anymore. We get one vote.

3:20

I mean, just think of it. How transparent is it to have one vote for Alberta Health Services under the Health budget? One vote. Is it \$19 billion now? I think so. One vote. No subvotes, no program descriptions, but we're supposed to glean out of this one number how transparent and accountable this government is. Really? How can we possibly hold the government and make them be accountable when this whole budgeting process has become such

a process of digging out and pulling the threads to see what the government is actually planning to do in a budget? There was so little information given.

The other example I'll give you just very quickly is the old: well, we'll tell you three years in advance. That's the newest one. So we get: "Oh, we're going to give a hundred and fifty million more dollars to the municipalities. Aren't we wonderful?" Well, hmm, over a three-year time period it's actually \$50 million a year, and that's not quite so impressive. They roll it together so they can talk about things with a much larger number, and it looks much more impressive. You know, that would even be a good thing if they would follow through with it.

But by the time you get into year 1 and a half of their three-year rollout, they've stopped talking about that program. It's disappeared, and the next time you see a budget, the performance measurement is gone. The indicator is gone. Nobody talks about that anymore. It just disappeared. Where's the accountability in that, Mr. Speaker? They roll all this money out. They promise it to these people. Big, impressive numbers: gone. How transparent and accountable is it to say: "We believe in cities and municipalities, the MSI money, absolutely. We're going to follow through on all our promises?" That is just a falsehood.

They say, "We were going to give \$1.6 billion over a three-year plan." They didn't even get close to that. Right from the get-go they ran a three-year program, and they never even got close to giving out that amount of money. Where are we, actually? Well, we're not doing \$1.6 billion. We're not doing \$1.2 billion. Oh, wait a minute. We're doing \$900 million, which is a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. I'm not debating that. We're a wealthy province, and we do pretty well. But, really, it's \$900 million. Don't try to put a party dress on that and throw some sparkles in your hair and go running out there pretending that it's \$1.2 billion because it's not.

Now, if you want to add a little purse to your party outfit, and the purse is worth about 300 and some-odd million dollars, you could say that the whole outfit was \$1.2 billion. Nice, huh? That's exactly what they've done. They're still paying \$900 million into MSI, and then they have a little purse that's called – I can't even remember what it is now – transit money or something that they've tucked in there as their little sparkly purse, you know, a little clutch, one that you take. Then they can say that it's an outfit worth \$1.2 billion. No, it isn't. We still haven't gotten anywhere close to the promise back from 2007 that there was going to be \$1.6 billion. Less and less information, less and less transparency, less and less accountability.

Now, the minister talks about that somehow what the Official Opposition has recommended is political and partisan. Oh, Mr. Speaker. Well, coming from this government, it's a little hard to choke down, friends. I've watched this government for a long period of time. I know how political you are, and I know how much you cover those areas of your body that you sit on frequently. I know how political you can be.

You know, by way of an example, the budget is supposed to be passed by the first of April. How many times has the budget been passed by the time we get into the fiscal year? Anybody? Anybody? Pop quiz. I think they've done it once in the time I've been here. Once. What kind of managerial skill and oversight and transparency and accountability does it take for a government to not get its budget done let's call it 17 out of 18 times? Like, wow. That's a pretty bad fail rate. You wouldn't pass that performance measurement.

And wait. We're not even talking about the need to pass the interim supply, which used to be called the special warrant. In order to give yourself money to continue operating, you always like to slide that one through. Wait, there's more. There's more, as

they say on the television commercial. For the same \$24.99 you are going to get one to two supplementary supply budgets a year. Now, sometimes supplementary supply budgets, in fact, are needed. There have been forest fires. There have been floods. There's actually a need to spend additional money. But let's talk politics, let's talk partisanship because that would be about when they say, "Oh, um, we just budgeted kind of low on the forest fires," which happen every year, then "Oops." They've got to put more money in there when it rolls around. Well, what do you think that's about? That's about delivering a budget to people where they go: "Look at how wonderful we are. We've got a surplus, and we're spending less than we're bringing in, blah, blah, blah." Not true, Mr. Speaker, because they haven't budgeted for a number of things they know will cost more. They deliberately lowball it and then bring it back in.

Are you checking to see whether "blah, blah, blah" is parliamentary, Mr. Speaker? I'm pretty sure it is, but do call me on it if I'm wrong.

We spend less time debating our budgets now. We no longer debate in the Assembly, where there's lots of room for people to come and listen. We're going to stuff everybody into a very small committee room, where they can't hear very well and there isn't enough room for the media and the guests. So do I think this is a good idea?

Oh, I'm sorry. There's one other thing the Provincial Treasurer said. I'm curious about why the Provincial Treasurer thinks that the budget officer would not be able to consult the same – and possibly different, maybe even more – experts for an opinion on the oil crisis in the budget. Surely, this would be an intelligent person. They can easily go and make the same kind of consultation and predictions on the price of oil as the government can. Maybe they'd be more accurate even. That's another political partisan trick this government has played on us for a very, very long time, to lowball the revenue and highball the expenses. Gosh darn, don't they end up with an awesome surplus?

So, Mr. Speaker, all in all, do I think a budget officer is a good idea? Yes, I do. I think it would be very helpful to us here in Alberta because the government has made such a job, such a mandate for itself to cover and obfuscate and disguise and put black plastic bags over things. I think it would be very helpful to put a little sunshine in there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. member, I was just asked by some members if 29(2)(a) was available, and I was just checking the record for that, not about anything that you might have asked about. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is not available for private members' bills, as most of us know, so that stands clarified.

Let us move on now. Is there anyone from the side here?

If not, then let's go over to Edmonton-Strathcona or Edmonton-Calder, whichever one of you. You have a spot here. Edmonton-Strathcona, please proceed.

Ms Notley: Oh, okay. Then we're right there already.

Well, this is an interesting piece of legislation that, generally speaking, we are in support of, in that there is a desperate need in this Legislature for some clarity and transparency with respect to how the financial information in this province is reported to Albertans and also to members of this Assembly. From that perspective it's long overdue. It's long overdue because it exists in most other jurisdictions, it's long overdue because it exists federally, it's long overdue because it exists in many other provinces, and it's long overdue because this particular govern-

ment has a well-documented history of, you know, overestimating revenue when it's politically convenient, underestimating revenue when it's politically convenient. Depending on whatever their particular political agenda is of the day, the expectation with respect to revenue is massaged, shall we say, to support whatever political objective it is that they are pursuing.

Ms Blakeman: Pummelled, maybe.

Ms Notley: Pummelled. The Member for Edmonton-Centre says that the actual numbers are pummelled, that I'm being too polite – me, of all people – to the government when I say that they're being massaged. But in any event, there's no question that those numbers warrant some well-informed, independent, third-party oversight, to which all members of this Assembly would have equal access. I know that's kind of a revolutionary thought, but, you know, it is true.

When we go into the budget lock-up, one of the things that I find very interesting is that we have that brief window of time where we get access to the finance officials who this government have endless access to and to which we have almost no access. For those 45 minutes when they're allowed into that room for us, we're able to sort of pepper them with questions, and it's like Christmas Day for some of us who are actually sort of interested in finding out what's going on in this government.

3:30

You know, they're quite good about answering questions. They try to be as straightforward and as transparent as possible. It's amazing. You'll have them tell you something, and it'll take you three weeks to extract it out of a minister in some other forum. It would be so lovely if we had that 45-minute Christmas morning opportunity, for those of us interested in genuine transparency in this province, actually as a matter of right in this House. [interjection] I'm talking about budget lock-up. That is why it would be so fabulous to have that extended to all members of this House.

Now, we definitely support better access to information for Albertans to understand the choices that their government is making and to be able to come to their own conclusions through a very clear and transparent and unspun analysis or, if it's going to be spun, that at least it's spun by everyone on both sides so Albertans get the opportunity to pick their spinner as opposed to being subject to only that which the government would like them to be aware of.

You know, a financial accountability officer would also get a more fulsome picture of the financial impacts of bills or proposals because the legislation would include a consideration of financial benefits as well as costs. I think that this is a very, very good idea.

The only qualification that I would give to that, with the greatest of respect to my colleagues over there in the Official Opposition and the even greater level of respect to my colleagues over there who are currently in government, is that I actually think that this bill was kind of drafted by a government-in-waiting, so it doesn't quite go as far as I think it could to ensure true guarantees of accountability. You know, it's a bill that allows for pretty much the whole purpose of the bill to be undermined through regulation after the fact. As members from the caucus who put this bill forward know, that's something that, generally speaking, we don't want to include in legislation because it means that we're just laying the groundwork to play the same games that the government is, and why would we want to play the same games as the government?

What we want to do is ensure that the bill itself sets the standards very clearly for everyone to understand and that it does not allocate authority to whomever the governing party is to undercut it in the future. That is one of the things that we're a little bit worried about with respect to this bill. Again, the intentions are excellent, and we support them a hundred and fifty per cent, but what we would like to do is really limit the authority that this current bill would delegate to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. We would like to limit the extent of that so that we have a clear understanding.

We also want to make sure that the mandate of the independent budget officer is more clearly delineated. Do we want another partisan patronage appointee following his or her marching orders from the government of the day, or do we want a budget officer with some teeth to provide us with transparent information and allow all Albertans to hold their government accountable? I would suggest that it is the latter that we are seeking. Currently, as the bill is drafted, I don't think that we can be totally sure we've got that clarity. I think that we need to look at giving more definition to the mandate of the independent budgetary officer.

In Ontario, for instance, the Ontario financial accountability officer not only may undertake to estimate the financial costs of bills or proposals; he or she may also undertake research into those costs. So it's a broader mandate which doesn't limit the officer to just adding and subtracting to provide an accounting cost to the public. Instead, the budget officer should be able to undertake whatever research is necessary to get a full analysis of the proposal that's put before him.

We would expand the IBO's mandate, beyond that which is included in this particular bill, to give the officer all of the powers that are necessary to provide a fully complete picture of the financial costs and benefits of any particular government action to the public.

We would also recommend that the independent budgetary officer be given the ability to undertake an analysis on his or her own initiative, and this is important to ensure that nonroutine analysis can be carried out on issues that are important to the province. Otherwise, we end up relying on the Legislative Assembly or a committee to request an analysis from the IBO, which allows political choices to dictate what will and will not be reviewed by the IBO. Again, I think we need to not do that. I think we need to give this independent officer the breadth of authority that he or she needs to really provide that important public service to all Albertans, transparency. So we want to make sure that we're not controlling the independent budget officer.

We should also ensure that there is meaningful input by all parties, regardless of size, in the appointment of the independent budget officer. I'm pretty sure that we would see that happening by way of an all-party committee, but I need to be sure that that's what the legislation prescribes. I think it does, but I'm just going to double-check on that. We want to have an all-party panel so that every party has an equal voice, and frankly I would suggest that we have an all-party panel where it is possible for the opposition to have the majority of the votes. Quite frankly, right now the government gets access to all this information anyway, so this is really about ensuring that this information is shared with all Albertans.

We want to also ensure that we provide in the legislation the necessary protections for the independent budget officer to carry out his or her duties without interference or pressure from the Assembly. In Ontario, for instance, the legislation specifically stipulates that the financial accountability officer shall not do any work that interferes with his or her duties to that office. [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] Already? For goodness' sake.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Anyone else who wishes to participate? Let us go to Airdrie, and then I have Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-Shaw unless I have others that wish to intervene.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. I'm happy to rise today in support of this Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act. I would preface my comments. You know, often in this Legislature we've heard the Finance minister talk about giving Albertans a choice between building and going into debt and not going into debt and building nothing. Those are the two options that he gives them. I think, Mr. Speaker and hon. minister, that a competent government could do both, could build and balance, could build what we need, could build the infrastructure that we need within the confines of the \$44 billion that we're bringing in. I think that's a reasonable request from the people of Alberta. We can do both.

Does that mean that we can build everything we want in the first year or two? No, but we can sure build a heck of a lot with a \$44 billion budget. But we have to be practical. We have to be smart about it. We can balance, and we can build. It is possible. A competent government would be able to do that.

I'm thankful for the comments by Edmonton-Centre on the difference between the independent budget officer and the Auditor General. Of course, the Auditor General looks back; the independent budget officer would look more forward. Hopefully, that's now understood by the Finance minister.

I would also point out that, actually, the Finance minister is wrong when he says that the way they did the budgeting for the deficit and so forth is the same as what they did back in Premier Klein's days. Obviously, I wasn't there during Premier Klein's days, but I was there, of course, during Premier Stelmach's days, in the first year there. They used to actually include in the deficit number all grants for school boards, hospital boards, regional health authorities, and so forth, and that was actually included in their consolidated budget number. Now, actually, they've moved those grants out of what they count as the deficit.

3:40

Mr. Horner: No, we haven't.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Yes, you have. I can go over the numbers. You have, Minister. It actually does dilute further the budget number. In fact, they made that change just in the last year as part of their moving SUCH-sector assets onto the books, and you should know that, Minister.

Anyway, I'm going to go over some of the pros – and there are many – of this act, of this bill. First off, I believe that this is a great idea because it would be an independent check on government. It would place an independent check on government in their predictions of revenue and expenditures, which would prevent government from essentially fudging the budget numbers.

We saw this, of course, prior to the last election, with the well-known Alice-in-Wonderland budget, as it was often called. The problem with that budget was that there were extremely unreasonable revenues that were projected by this government prior to the election so that they could promise billions and billions in new spending, and of course it was just pie in the sky. Now, everyone knew that, and I'm pretty sure the Premier and the Finance minister knew it, too, but they still went forward with those numbers, and they did so purely for political purposes. Having an independent budget officer would stop this practice so that when we go into a budget, we can actually have a reasonable understanding and confidence in what the budget numbers, in fact,

are for revenue and expenditures, specifically for revenue in that example.

Under this, the proposed bill, any MLA or committee would have the ability to request an independent cost estimate of a project. A classic example: the Minister of Infrastructure or of Transportation – I forget which; they switched. Anyway, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti said, in answer to a question, that the southwest leg of the ring road will cost anywhere between 1 and a half billion dollars and \$10 billion. We saw an estimate from the Minister of Infrastructure today saying that it would be more in the \$5 billion range. Actually, I think it was from the Finance minister, that it would be more in the \$5 billion range.

There's obviously a huge amount – between \$1 billion and \$10 billion is a lot. It would be nice to have an independent budget officer to kind of put a number value on these big projects and these big initiatives of government so that all the members of the House can debate using a common set of facts instead of the government saying, "Oh, it's going to cost this much; the south-side hospital is going to cost \$500 million" when, in fact, no, it didn't cost \$500 million. It cost 1 and a half billion dollars and rising. And there are many other examples of that. Or the MLA offices across the way in the federal building, which is now up to almost \$400 million when it started as about a \$250 million project.

Having that independent officer would help us know these things before the money is spent so that we can debate whether it's proper, whether it's good government, good governance to go ahead with such projects or initiatives. The independence of the office would ensure that Albertans are receiving fair and politically unaltered information regarding the expected financial position of the province. Of course, that goes back to the budgeting and the three different budgeting documents that the government puts out for operational, capital, and saving and how we've had much confusion from the majority of commentators and folks looking at the budget. I've received thousands of letters, e-mails, et cetera, on this issue. Many have CCed the Finance minister, so I know that he's getting a lot of them. People are confused about what the real numbers are, and this would help with that.

Groups like the Chambers of Commerce, of course, would recognize the importance of this, and I think that that's something, certainly, to be noted. All 50 states, Canada's federal government, and an increasing number of provinces have an independent budget officer to ensure this type of transparency and accountability. This is not a new endeavour. It makes sense. It's pretty standard across North America and in the Westminster system.

The cost for establishing the office would be negligible as we would have the staff and expertise essentially move over from the Finance department. This is key. We're not talking about adding new bureaucracy. We're talking about taking what the Finance ministry already does, taking those resources, plopping them into an independent office so that they could do their job independent of any political influence from the Finance minister.

Of course, this demonstrates our commitment in the Wildrose to accountability, since we fully expect this officer to be holding us to account as government, and we very much look forward to having that. I think it's a good tool for government to help us to control our costs, to help us make decisions based on proper input, and to make sure the entire caucus knows what those costs will be so that they can in caucus and in the Legislature make their voices heard and have the facts at their disposal so that they can use those facts to argue for or against certain government initiatives, programs, and building projects, et cetera.

It can also be very difficult for opposition parties and third-party groups to hold government accountable when we don't have access to adequate information. It is truly hard. It's hard to make budget presentations, alternative budgets, and so forth when we don't know what some of these things will cost. Obviously, we don't have the Department of Infrastructure or the Department of Finance to come up with these projections and to come up with these things. This would improve democracy by making sure all opposition parties have access to the proper information to give constructive criticism.

Wildrose, of course, truly wants to change the way government does business, making it more transparent, accountable, and acting on behalf of Albertans, not the government party. To preserve independence, this bill makes it so that no MLA or former MLA can be appointed budget officer. I think that's a good idea. Also, the officer can only be reappointed to one five-year term. In other words, there's a two-term limit. The independent budget officer could be mandated to produce true consolidated budget forecasts that include a consolidated cash-in, cash-out deficit number, and it would prevent the government from playing its current fiscal shell game.

It would prevent the provincial government from politicizing economic indicators like energy prices and the so-called bitumen bubble. The IBO would be the authority on these indicators, so politicians could not over- or underestimate revenues for political gains. It would also be an extra check on government, as we've talked about, for project expenditure estimates and would provide an independent analysis of what government projects are feasible under certain parameters.

The IBO would also be at the disposal of the Legislative committees to aid them in their work when they are needed in assessing different initiatives that they are undertaking to study and so forth. Where the mandate of the Auditor General only allows for after-the-fact analysis of where the money has been poorly spent and how not to repeat poor spending, the work of the IBO could prevent poor spending. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Did I get that right?

Mr. Wilson: You did.

Mr. Anderson: All right. There you go.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I'd like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. No one in this Legislature has seen more bills, more private members' bills, passed in the history of this Legislature than this member. I hope very much that this will just be another notch in her very successful belt.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else here?

Then we'll go to the leader of the Liberal opposition, and then we'll go to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake unless there's someone from the fourth party.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this bill without amendments. The Alberta Liberals seek to build a strong economy and a strong society premised on the facts of fiscal prudence, social and environmental responsibility. If you look at Alberta's current economic situation, this is as good as it gets. We have amongst the highest employment rates on the planet. Our population has grown. We're getting younger. Our incomes are high. The price of oil and gas is quite high. Yet the current Conservative government is taking our province into debt and cutting back the very programs that help build a strong society and a better economy.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre did a wonderful job of schooling the Finance minister. Not only did she undress him, but she just re-dressed him with a nice purse with some trinkets in it. That's exactly what the government does with the current budgeting process. They change the definition of budgeting. On one hand, they're going into debt; on the other hand, they have a surplus; on the other hand, they're picking up money from their bank account, their credit card to put it into their savings account. They have thoroughly confused the whole budgeting process.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we've looked at the government's budgeting and the government's typical reply is: this is going to cost more money and these policies and procedures already exist. It's been highlighted that the Auditor General really analyzes past budgets, when the mistakes have already been made and hundreds of millions and maybe even billions have been wasted. That money could have been used elsewhere. A parliamentary budget officer would analyze the present state of affairs and help all of us legislators. In fact, I believe they would probably help the government make better decisions.

Now, the Alberta Liberals – and we thank the Wildrose. This is a good thing. The Liberals and the Wildrose agree on this. In fact, the former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had offered an amendment when the government was bringing in this results-based budgeting in 2012. His amendment was about fiscal accountability, responsibility, and it was about adding a parliamentary budget officer so that every political party would have accurate, current, and forward information in order to prepare, to make sure that we all support good fiscal policy. But that amendment was voted down by the government at that time. I thank the hon. members, you know, from the Wildrose for having the bill drawn up and bringing this forward, because the Alberta Liberals supported it then and we support it now regardless of which political party brings it forward.

The concept of an independent budget officer has enjoyed support across the country in federal and provincial governments: the Liberals, the New Democrats, and Conservatives alike. It's an idea with a broad appeal that no one political party claims ownership to but all agree is necessary across the country, whether it's federally or provincially. In Ontario the Liberals and the New Democrats worked on it. In Alberta the Liberals and the Wildrose agree on this concept.

Before the election we called this the fudge-it budget, that the government was taking an overly optimistic approach to their forecast. Guess what happened, Mr. Speaker? The day after the election: oops; we didn't see it coming. We called it the bankrupt budget. Suddenly the government used a whole different level of forecasting as an excuse to break all their promises and to hurt the very programs that built a great province and a strong society.

This budget we call the over-under budget. Over-under is where the government is not quite sure which way they want to go. What we do know is that regular middle-income and lower middle-income Albertans are overtaxed. Yeah, the billionaires are undertaxed. It's an over-under budget because regular middle-class, middle-income, lower middle-income Albertans are underserved by the very government that is elected to serve them when it comes to getting teachers for our children, nurses and family doctors and health staff for the sick and elderly, and the social workers that we need to care for our children in care.

Mr. Speaker, the government has put in its budget a lot of reactionary spending whereas if we actually invested in upstream prevention, we would not only save money; we would actually improve the lives of people. If we critically analyze every dollar

of spending and see if that dollar was well spent, we can actually have the resources to make the essential investments into early childhood development; full-day kindergarten; more teachers for our children, to reduce the class sizes; more support for those teachers; to embed social workers, mental health counsellors, nurses, nurse practitioners, police officers, school resource officers into the school system so that we can build our schools as community hubs, so that schools can be used for the whole community. But the government has no money to invest because they have mismanaged and wasted a lot of taxpayer money.

One thing that's very essential is the election of the budget officer, the process of selecting the budget officer. Simply having the office and then having the government appoint – you know, the officer can be a watchdog, or it can be a lapdog. If the government unanimously appoints their own hand-picked individual, they can set it up so that it's just another lapdog. We just elected an electoral officer that was unanimously supported by every political party. That's how the selection should be. It should be unanimous support by all political parties for the individual that is elected to serve in this position, not because one of our political parties has the vast majority of the votes on a committee. If there was an Alberta Liberal government – and my sincere hope is that it is time to have that government in place – we would want every political party here to have equal say on who that individual is.

Mr. Speaker, I simply believe that this province can do better, and it should do better. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward good public policy. Good ideas should be accepted regardless of the source, and they should not be rejected by the government because the source is not within that same government.

Thank you, hon. member. You have the support of the Alberta Liberals on this bill. I believe it's a good bill, and I believe it's a bill that would set this province back onto good fiscal prudence so that we can actually take that extra money that's being wasted right now, mismanaged, to invest in the essential services our children require, our seniors require, and working families require, so that we can actually cut taxes for the middle-income and lower middle-income Albertans and cut school fees and lower tuitions, lower the cost of bills so that we don't see fine Albertans into poverty. So, hon. member, thank you so much. The Alberta Liberals support prudent fiscal management and support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Then we will go to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 202 from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I'm speaking today in support of this bill, which is being tabled to protect Albertans against politically motivated misappropriation of their hard-earned tax dollars. Bill 202 is a private member's bill tabled by the hon. MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek. Private member's Bill 202 isn't just an idea; it's a sound structure that provides Albertans with clear parameters before dollars are spent.

This bill has seen support from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce as well as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The Calgary Chamber of Commerce has said that it only makes good business sense to operate government in a businesslike manner. The Calgary chamber talked about how their own businesses must operate within their budgets. Why not the PC government? The Calgary chamber has also said that Albertans run their households under budgets, that Albertans must budget for things like groceries, heat, shelter, transportation, saving for their next

vehicle, and putting aside for a rainy day. They said that if everyday Albertans can budget, why shouldn't our government?

It makes good business sense to create an office for an independent provincial budget officer, an office free of political influence and tasked to oversee and transparently report on government budgets and expenses. It makes sense for the Auditor General to audit and the independent budget officer to budget. That's how businesses are run.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has over 20 years in the political arena. She learned a long time ago that you listen to the will of the people. We have all learned that this government has not learned from those past mistakes. This government still believes that after 43 years in power they have autocratic rule. This government continues to believe they know better than everyday Albertans and that they in their wisdom have the right to spend tax dollars as they see fit.

Sadly, as we have seen in the last month, that's just not the case. The role of government is to ensure that when they spend even one dollar of taxpayer money, they remember that it's not their money. When you choose to use government resources to attend PC Party fundraisers, pick up your families from vacations, or have a genuine disrespect for those that elected you, then you know that the system has let Albertans down.

That's the beauty of Bill 202. Bill 202 provides for an independent budget officer, whose job would be to report to the Legislature on the estimated finances of the province, to provide a true and accurate picture of the state of Alberta, all of this without the political wrangling or the jargon that explains why this government no longer reports the budget in a way that all Albertans can understand. This officer would provide the government with realistic figures and economic trends and forecasts. This officer would produce the underlying economic data for provincial budgets. This officer would provide Albertans with transparency and accuracy.

4:00

The purpose of an independent budget officer is to produce budget estimates that are independent, unbiased, and untainted by political interference or political gain. There will be many members on the other side of this House who may want to support this bill, but they cannot. They may want to speak in favour of it, but they will likely have to oppose it. I remind those members that in a time of political hardship within your own party, you ran on a government for the people and to the people.

I'd like to take it one step further. Let's talk about the comments most recently made the Finance minister. The Minister of Finance talked about the budget coming to the opposition, that the opposition has an opportunity to review the budget. The budget, that time allotted, he talked about being an onerous and long process. However, what the Finance minister forgot to tell Albertans is that they've actually cut the time for budget review, that the government controls one hundred per cent the access that we have to the amount of time that we want to review the budget, and that even in a three-hour allocation of time in reality there is only 30 to 60 minutes in which the opposition can actually question the budget.

What the Finance minister also forgot to mention to Albertans – and I myself and my colleagues experienced this last year, and I'm sure we'll experience it again – is that if the minister doesn't want to answer the questions on the budget, quite frankly, he doesn't have to. Anyone who listens to budget estimates will find that there are many cases in which the minister runs the clock and talks all about the plan for Albertans rather than talking about the questions that actually relate to the budget.

As indicated as well by the Liberal member for the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, she's been here for 18 budget processes, and in 18 budget processes the last few budgets are the ones that no longer have line items and no longer allow us to really drill down into where the money is going.

One other thing the Minister of Finance also indicated is that, essentially, if we dare question how the budget is reported, we're not in line with other provinces or the federal government. The fact of the matter is that this budget is not reported in the same way as the federal government's, and it is not reported in the same way that Albertans expect. He goes on further to sort of insinuate and demean and bully other members who might ask questions about this.

Mr. Horner: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Towle: And he goes on by saying . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the President of Treasury Board has risen on a point of order.

Citation and the point of order, please, hon. member.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the citation is 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member just insinuated that I am bullying someone. She just insinuated that I am lying to this Assembly. I take great umbrage in that.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in 2003 the government changed to the expense basis and followed the public-sector accounting standards and the Alberta financial management commission report. So the last four budgets under Premier Klein – 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 – were all done the same way. In fact, the public-sector accounting principles are followed by this government, and I would ask that the hon. member refrain from accusing me of bullying anyone on that side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader for a response.

Mr. Anderson: Obviously, this isn't a point of order. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake feels very strongly that the minister is construing the budget in a way that makes it difficult for Albertans to understand and then being very condescending and bullying those who disagree with him. I think that that's a feeling that many people have. He can disagree with that feeling, but she has every right to state that. There is no point of order here, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I was listening, and I was just taking out Bill 202 to see where the member was going with this, to see if somebody was going to rise under *Beauchesne* 459 for relevance.

Mr. Rodney: Relevance.

The Speaker: Well, no. She was tying it to budget processes and so on.

However, as we know in this House, words sometimes do get used in ways that can be interpreted as being what the hon. President of Treasury Board has said. On the other hand, as the Member for Airdrie just clarified, they can also be used in another way intentionally or unintentionally.

So let's leave this matter as a point of clarification for now, but let's be very careful, hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and

all members. Just be respectful of each other. If nothing else, please be respectful of each other.

Let's carry on with your debate. You have four minutes left.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will go back to the relevance of it.

An independent budget officer would not allow the Minister of Finance to continue to say that anyone who questions the budget is doing it for political gain or politicizing the process. An independent budget officer would remove that armour that he arms himself with every single day.

Bill 202 would also eliminate the ability of the Premier to go on national or provincial TV and indicate that the reason the budget has to change so drastically, the reason they have to cut \$42 million from PDD, the reason they reduced the budgets of universities by some 7.2 per cent is because of the bitumen bubble. That wasn't a media presentation. That was actually the Premier saying it herself. An independent budget officer, because the process would be more open and transparent, would actually allow the government to stop misleading Albertans.

The other thing the independent budget officer would go on to allow is forecasting. The Minister of Finance indicated in his response that our province is different than other provinces. I highly doubt that we are any different. The province of Saskatchewan has oil and resource revenue. The province of B.C. has the same. Those provinces have to forecast. They have to do the exact same process as we do, and they have to listen to their constituents. Interestingly enough, the province of Saskatchewan is able to do all of that and stay in a balanced budget.

Many Albertans are small-business owners, and Bill 202 reflects that. Many Albertans are large-business owners. Each and every one of us has to forecast, each and every one of us has to answer to shareholders, and each and every one of us has to answer to the people that work for us. Bill 202 allows Albertans the same opportunity to do what small-business owners do every single day. Every single day we forecast. Every single day we live within our means. Every single day – and the Minister of Finance is right about this – we do leverage every opportunity. The difference between the government and business owners is that you're not using your own money. This government seems to have forgotten that they have no money, that they are using taxpayer money. So when you report to taxpayers, that report should be fulsome, should be complete, should be open, and it should be transparent. Bill 202 would do that.

The minister asked how an independent budget officer would benefit Albertans. Bill 202 would ensure that the government's budgetary process is wholly transparent and accountable. Bill 202 would empower the independent budget officer to review the budget and help the government allocate provincial dollars before they are spent. I know it's a novel idea, but it can be done. This officer would help keep Alberta's budgets on task, balanced, and focused, and that should not be too much to ask from a government who's been in power for 43 years. You would think that at least they could do that.

The officer would also look at creating more complex economic forecasts and providing guidance on how governments should prepare their budgets to better weather Alberta's inevitable boom-and-bust cycles, little things like the bitumen bubble, and, you know, all those rainy-day funds that have apparently blindsided the government for a decade or more. Every person in this room has lived through the boom and bust. Every single person in this room knows that the market goes up, the market comes down, and

the market goes up again. Every single time we say that we'll do it differently, and every single time we say that we won't spend as much as we did the last time because we have to save for a rainy day. Well, the rainy day comes every year, whether it's the fire in Slave Lake, whether it's the flooding in High River or a multitude of other events that are detrimental to this province, yet this government continues to underfund that line item in the budget.

Here are two examples of how the minister can understand – understand – how an independent budget officer could benefit Albertans. Let's look at the forecast, suggesting a cap for, say, ministerial meals. On the menu there's a big fat, juicy steak priced at \$99 and a very nice chicken cordon bleu meal for \$35. One would think you'd make better choices.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there anyone else who wishes to participate in this debate? I see Calgary-Shaw wanting in, so let's hear from Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to support this bill strongly, and I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward. As I'm sure you're well aware, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a long history of successfully bringing forward and passing private members' bills in this Assembly. She has been a long-time champion for children in this province. She has passed the protection of children involved in prostitution bill. She has passed an organ and tissue donation bill and the mandatory reporting of child pornography bill. She continues today with the tabling, and here we are in second reading of Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act.

4:10

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest honours that I've had serving in this caucus is being able to serve with the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. She exemplifies integrity, and this bill is very much in line and in order with that.

Many of the bills that she put up for debate and that have passed in this House before are about protecting the children in this province, and I'm proud to say that I believe this one is also, in a way, about protecting our children. The reason why many of us over on this side of the House talk about responsible budgeting and debt is because we recognize that essentially what we're doing is intergenerational theft. We are taking from our kids and our grandkids and forcing upon them the repayment of massive amounts of debt financing, that we, quite frankly, just don't believe is an ethical way of operating. So thank you to the hon. member for, again, bringing this forward and having this on our agenda today.

I believe this is necessary because it would allow this government to produce budgets and budget estimates that are unbiased and untainted by political interference. I think it's quite clear that, you know, that does happen in a partisan environment. It's the way the world operates. We accept that. You should accept that, understand that it's true. It is simply that. It's a truth in the world that we live in and operate in.

This would be a resource for all MLAs. It would level the playing field. Opposition would have access to independent analysis of budget numbers. It would be for ourselves currently as the Official Opposition, and the opposition party, the fourth party, and independent members would have access to the exact same information and would be able to hold the government to account at a much higher level than what they are right now because, quite frankly, we have to take the government at its word just based on the documents that they produce. We've seen before that some of the projections that they have are not necessarily, I would say, in

line with reality. That, I think, is what some of us have alluded to in the Alice-in-Wonderland budget that we saw back in 2012, pre-election, which allowed this Premier to go all over the province, to tour around, to promise to spend all kinds of money, and to spread and sprinkle pixie dust of 50 new schools and increased MSI funding of \$1.6 billion, all in the hope of having, I think, \$112-per-barrel oil at the time.

Mr. Anderson: Who knows? It was something like that.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. It was ridiculously high, anyway.

I think the lesson that was learned was that, clearly, we shouldn't budget that much based on the commodity market.

The bitumen bubble is another reason why we believe strongly that an independent officer being able to look at budget projections and the realities of the money that is being spent or is going to be spent on projects is a critical function that we and many other governments in North America have employed, whether it be the federal government in Canada or all 50 states.

Let's just think for a moment about some of the ideas or some of the projects that we could have independent budget analysis done for, Mr. Speaker. There's the federal building, which started at a couple of hundred million dollars. It seems like every year we hear about another \$25 million being spent. You know, we now have a rooftop garden; we have a new suite that's being built up on the top level for, I guess, visiting dignitaries or whomever.

The Calgary South Health Campus, definitely a needed institution, started out as a \$500 million project and finished with about \$1.3 billion to \$1.4 billion spent on that. Again, it just boggles the mind how this government can stand there and say that they're getting these things right and they don't need an independent officer. Well, clearly they do.

The southwest ring road in Calgary is a critical piece of infrastructure, particularly for the residents in Calgary-Shaw, probably Calgary-Lougheed, Calgary-Fish Creek, who absolutely have been waiting for this to happen, waiting for it to become a reality. We have a Transportation minister who can't determine whether or not it's going to cost – I think he said between \$1.8 billion and \$10 billion. That is a phenomenally large window that he has left himself in terms of constructing this. When you look at other sections of the ring road, whether it be Edmonton or Calgary, in Calgary I believe there were 70 kilometres completed for less than \$2 billion. Now we have a 41-kilometre stretch that is going to cost – I guess the Finance minister alluded to perhaps \$5 billion at your chamber luncheon last week.

Again, when you do a per-kilometre analysis on that, the math just doesn't quite add up. So here is another perfect example of why an independent officer can look at this and go: that's just not quite right, and here is what the actual projected cost is going to be. Then we as the opposition could hold them to account, have a dialogue in public about these things.

Fifty new schools. Some people think it's going to cost about \$2 billion. Originally, in 2012, that was a \$2.4 billion promise, including the 70 modernizations as well. In the budget we have \$1.2 billion allocated. In some miraculous way they're going to be able to build 50 new schools and modernize 70 more, by the next election no less, for only \$1.2 billion.

Transmission lines. I know the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre would like nothing more than to be able to stand up here and debate the cost of transmission lines in this province, but an independent budget officer would be able to tell us what that would cost beforehand. It would be nice to have fair and politically unaltered information regarding the financial position of this province.

When you look at some of the other independent offices that exist within our Legislature and in our province, they provide value, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Advocate becoming an independent office was one of the few things that I applaud the Premier for doing when she became the Premier of the province. It was one of the first actions that she took, and it has boded well. The reason for that is because they took an office that was operating under the auspices of Human Services and made it independent. They were no longer, I guess, prone to any sort of government influence and could tell Albertans what it was that they felt was going on in our province without the fear of government repercussions.

The cost of this would be negligible as the work is already being done in the Ministry of Finance. It's just transplanting individuals working in that bureaucracy into an independent office.

Now, one of the Wildrose commitments is to truly be open and transparent, and we recognize, as I think the federal Conservatives did when they instituted their Parliamentary Budget Officer back in 2006 – just for the sake of history, Mr. Speaker, let's go back. In 2006 the Liberal government falls. The Conservative government runs a campaign around accountability, and one of their first acts when they became government with their minority government in '06 was the Federal Accountability Act. One of the reasons why they instituted the PBO was because of countless years of Liberal budgets where they miscalculated or misrepresented the numbers to the tune of billions of dollars. It allowed them to have election campaign spending that was inordinate, or they could go and campaign on a budget that was just not based on fact. Quite frankly, it seems like we're starting to see that here in Alberta. It's not something that's new, but it's something that we've certainly had to deal with.

Now, that Parliamentary Budget Officer wasn't fully independent – I think that was one of the mistakes they made when they created that office, and it did create some problems – but the opposition in Ottawa now refers to the PBO as an essential position. It's a thorn in the side of the government, Mr. Speaker, and that's why it's absolutely no surprise to anyone over here that the Minister of Finance nor anyone else – well, I guess they're not really going to speak to it – wants it on the governing side. It's an extra set of eyes on the books that they're trying to present to Albertans. It's not a surprise to us at all that we're not going to get support on this bill from the government.

But it does go to show the Alberta public the kinds of things that a Wildrose government would do, because we recognize that if we're going to govern this province differently, it starts with us, and it starts with being truly accountable and truly open. Having a second set of eyes on the books, having an independent budget officer is exactly one of the first steps that I believe we should be taking in the event that we do have the opportunity to govern in Alberta.

We've already covered why it's different than the Auditor General. Their current mandate is to look at an after-the-fact analysis of the spending, whereas an independent budget officer would be looking at spending programs that have yet to happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? Let us move on to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who wishes to speak.

4:20

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was good to hear the Minister of Finance get up and defend and yet politicize the

budget. This is exactly why this is being brought forward. An independent budget officer doesn't politicize it. It is nonpartisan. It's a process that's not new. It's a process that is actually working in other jurisdictions, and it works because an independent budget officer doesn't have a political agenda. They give economic forecasts. They provide analysis. They do it in the form of reports, testimony, memos, letters, and presentations. It also provides online access to key revenue and spending data for a number of past years.

Now, given what we have been through in our last two budgets – well, our last budget and this one that has yet to be approved – nothing can be clearer than the ongoing analysis at Stanford University looking at how governments present budgets. It's interesting because what the Stanford scholars are saying is that more and more governments are changing their reporting methodologies to hide deficits, and that is absolutely what's going on here. We have a government that has changed the way it reports so they can say that they have a balanced budget while they're actually borrowing money, while they're actually having a deficit, where the total revenue coming in is less than what we're spending, but that's fine because the way we change our reporting is that we're not going to show that deficit, and we're going to tell the public – we're going to put that nice little spin on it – that we actually have a surplus when in reality the numbers just don't add up. It goes on and on and on, dealing with this politicization of how we're spending our money.

Nothing is a better example of a number of these things, this misinformation hitting the public, than this commitment to build schools, throwing up signs to say that we are going to build X number of schools when, in fact, it's just not going to happen in the time frame that this government has said – and the industry has said that – but we presented in the budget that it will be done. To disguise this fact, we get a government who puts up signs and takes credit for schools that were approved under another administration and says, "That's part of our commitment," when, in fact, it wasn't. So you get this kind of misleading responsible government. [interjections] I'm splitting hairs, but if you want to call a point of order, call a point of order. I would be more than happy to defend it. But I don't know any other way to describe it. If you say that you're going to do something and you can't do it and that's verified by the people who are responsible for doing it, which is the construction industry, but you still commit to saying that it's being done, I don't know of any other way to describe it.

If you say that you're not running a deficit but the total income coming in does not match the amount that you're spending, which is far greater, I don't know how you can call that a balanced budget. You're borrowing. We're going into debt, and depending on how we're going into debt and how much we're going into debt, it's something I don't think Albertan's agreed to. I certainly didn't hear, when we campaigned two years ago, that that's what was going to happen, yet given the current trend we're looking at tens of billions of dollars here, and it could be as much as \$21 billion by the time we get into the election or more, depending on what our next budget is.

Again, it's how the budget is presented. That's what this bill takes care of. We get an independent officer that's not just in a sense qualified but with the fact that the independent officer himself has no partisan relationship. We've seen this work in other jurisdictions, and this is a jurisdiction that now begs for it, with the behaviour of our current government, to alter the way they report, to present it or spin it in a different way than what is actually happening. So when we look at budgets, how do we match it up with the previous budgets we've had? It's very difficult for the average person in the public to be able to do that

because we've changed the whole reporting mechanism by rolling out these three stages of our budget plan.

So we're dealing with this issue on a number of levels, and the Member for Calgary-Shaw actually touched on it. One of the issues we cannot get in this budget, that the typical municipality accomplishes, is: what is our infrastructure priority list? The best answer we can get from the minister is, "Look at the website," which is really nice, but there's nothing on the website that gives us a priority list. When a budget is presented at any municipal level, the infrastructure priority list is prioritized one through whatever, and the budget line is drawn at its appropriate level of what's funded and what is not funded. The argument always is about, right at that funded line, what projects should have a priority over another.

Now, we understand that when you have the natural disasters like the flood of last year, all bets are off. You have an emergency situation that has to be addressed. Certain things that were supposedly funded in the budget will now not get funded as we take care of the emergency. That is something that is commonplace, and the public understands. But without an infrastructure priority list nobody knows where these hospitals that are needed stand in relationship to other communities, nobody knows where our seniors' homes stand in relationship to other communities. So when the budget is reported, we get a sense of: will our projects get built this year, next year, three years down the road? We don't know. We can't even begin to measure that. That's what a budget reporting process is about, and that's where an independent budget officer has a lot of value and a lot of credibility in speaking to the communities and dealing with these budget issues to help these communities identify within the provincial budget where their values, where their programs, where their interests lie, and how they measure that.

It also makes governing, I think, a little bit more efficient. When a mayor of Rocky Mountain House knows that their hospital falls third in line behind two other communities, they can actually watch as one hospital gets built, and they should be moving up on the list. The mayor of that community will know that if some natural disaster were to happen at another hospital – a flood, damage, whatever reason – that money has to go to that repair because of that emergency basis, but they still know that they should keep their priority system, that they're going to be somewhere in that top three, that top two to get those critical-need infrastructure projects funded and eventually started and eventually built.

What we get when we don't have an infrastructure priority list is a hodgepodge situation that affects somewhere like the community of Bentley, where the minister promises that we're going to build a bypass, and we do it budget year after budget year after budget year and never fulfill that promise. Then they plop a sign down this year that says, "building Alberta," dig up the road, and then leave it not capped so that the silt runs off into the river and violates our environmental laws. The community is going to hold a centennial, and they've got a mess left behind by this building Alberta, and the project is now not going forward.

So what happens? What's the answer? How do we take care of it? This is the stuff that independent budget officers can actually help communities deal with and can actually help the government in dealing with a priority list. When the minister or the cabinet or the Treasury Board is contemplating their annual budget, have input from an independent budget officer on how well they managed the last one, without the partisanship, without the spin, to give them honest answers on the transparency and the actual implementation of that budget and how well it worked, how well

that performed based on what they constructed that previous year. That is a better tool moving forward.

If we don't have that tool, what we get is this idea that some of our people responsible are believing the spin. When they do that, they can't make well-informed decisions, and we get this hodgepodge of projects around the province. The last thing we can afford to do is waste money. That's what everybody always gets upset about in the political debates. All around Alberta, in every coffee shop, people look at waste.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others who wish to speak to Bill 202? Let us go and recognize, then, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

4:30

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak in support of this well-thought-out bill, much needed, I suggest.

It's been mentioned in this Chamber that the Auditor General performs this kind of function. Well, of course, we all know that auditors are reporting historic events. They can't do anything to prevent the waste that they may identify. They can give advice, suggest changes that ought to be made, follow up on that after the next budget year to see whether it's been acted on, and so on. But Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act, that's been brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, is a preventative measure.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It kind of reminds me, being an old trucker, about the wisdom of changing the filter when you're changing the oil to prevent problems that could occur rather than waiting and paying for the expense of the problem subsequent to it happening. What we're seeing here and what I thank the hon. member for doing in bringing this bill forward is something that's preventative. It's way cheaper to change the filter than it is to replace the engine.

We know, too, from experience and business philosophy and wise people that have suggested this truth, that systems are perfectly aligned to achieve the results that they produce, so if we've got a problem, if we're consistently running deficits, as we see that we've been doing over the past number of years – no matter what you call it, if you spend more than you're taking in, you're borrowing, and that's a deficit position. You can redefine it, and you can call black "white," but you're not fooling anybody but your own Kool-Aid drinkers, I believe. We've been getting these kinds of results, and it's time to recognize the truth, that Alberta doesn't have a revenue problem. It has a spending problem.

Bill 202 would result in an independent budget officer who would be free from influence, free from intimidation and bullying. This officer would act in the best interests of all Albertans. He would be able to prevent an increase of debt, which at the current rate is projected to result in interest payments by 2017, just three years down the road, of \$840 million a year. Now, I don't know about you, but the people I'm talking to out there in my riding think that's scandalous. They think that it would be far better for us to be using that money to build schools debt free. You can build a lot of schools for \$840 million a year, lots of roads. You could hire lots of teachers and nurses and front-line workers with that money, that instead will be going to line the pockets of bankers and lenders.

Budgets are based on assumptions, Mr. Speaker, and a budget or a projection is only as good as the quality of the assumptions themselves. An independent budget officer would help us look at

and evaluate the validity of the assumptions that that budget is based on. If the assumptions were faulty, he could point that out. Again, it's a lot better to know ahead of time that something that you're basing a budget on is faulty instead of discovering it later. It's very expensive to find that after the fact. It's much better, much more prudent to anticipate those problems and strengthen the quality of your assumptions.

A hallmark of this government seems to be its desire to be unique and innovative. As they clamour to spend money to achieve this expensive goal, they demonstrate a pride that, I think, too often blinds them to successful solutions that are working elsewhere. My old dad, the grade 10 dropout, said: never be too proud to borrow a good idea. He was credited with several innovations that actually worked, taking somebody else's idea and making it better or just simply using a good idea that he saw somebody else doing that made the work easier or safer or less expensive.

Well, if 50 states, our own federal government, and an increasing number of provinces have adopted the principle of the concept of an independent budget officer, why wouldn't we? Now, I think that's a fair question. Why wouldn't we? Clearly, we wouldn't because it works. It reins in and makes more difficult partisan spending, and that's just what we need to do. We need to stop that. We need to prevent it. It avoids using taxpayers' money for partisan purposes. Remember, Mr. Speaker, governments have no money of their own. It's all taxpayers' money. It's a sacred stewardship that bears the responsibility of the public purse.

Spending royalty receipts instead of saving and investing them, like in Premier Lougheed's visionary creation, the heritage savings trust fund, is foolhardy. The government is selling assets, the assets that all Albertans own: the oil that's in the ground, the natural gas that's in the ground. That's an asset. We're selling it, and we're treating the revenue that's received as if it was income, as if we were doing something that added wealth when, in fact, we're selling an asset. We're disposing of an asset. It's like eating your own seed corn. This government continues to do that, and nobody is holding them to account. [interjection] But the Albertans that I'm talking to, Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and anybody else that wishes to interject and interrupt – if you're not listening to your own people, shame on you. Every coffee shop I go into and every conversation I have is: "Can't you stop the government from wasting our money? Can't you get them to save and invest in our future? Why are we saddling our future generations with debt now when if we were more prudent we wouldn't be in this position?"

The hon. member that sits next to me mentioned the fact that when you have these floods and these rainy-day events, then naturally you have to make some adjustments to your budget. Well, you know what? We created a rainy-day fund. But instead of saving that money for the rainy days that inevitably come, we spent it to buy elections, to buy popularity, and it's this partisan spending that an independent budget officer would help prevent.

I believe that all small "c" fiscally conservative members of this House ought to join me in voting in support of Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and speak in support of my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek's bill today, Bill 202. Bill 202 was introduced into the House on the day before

the budget was read, and I can assure all the hon. members that the timing of this was no coincidence.

Mr. Speaker, my Wildrose colleagues and I predicted the budget to be full of double-talk, and it was. We predicted that the budget documents would be split apart in an effort to confuse Albertans, and they were. We predicted the budget figures would be hand-picked and spun to look favourable for the government, and they were. This government has put Alberta \$5 billion further into debt to deliver a budget that they, incredibly, claim as balanced. Not quite sure how you balance a budget with a deficit number, but this government did it. Bravo.

Mr. Bikman: They changed the definitions.

Mr. Fox: They changed the definitions. That's right. They changed the definition. We know it's not balanced, Mr. Speaker. It's not even close to being balanced. Estimates of the forecast deficit range from \$1.8 billion to \$3.9 billion, and our budget crunching pegs it at about \$2.7 billion. Why is that? It's because we don't actually have access to the same information that the government has access to. This is something that would be rectified by this budget officer, somebody who would actually be independent and would provide all members of this Legislature with the same information.

This is a government-made problem, but it also affects our ability as elected officials to provide our constituents with accurate accounting information of the province's fiscal picture. This type of financial reporting is not only irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, but it's dishonest. Albertans deserve better. Bill 202 seeks to remedy this going forward by providing an opportunity for members and ultimately the public to receive government information and budget estimates through an independent third party that reports directly to this Legislature.

The mandate of the Alberta independent budget officer would be to

- (a) provide independent analysis to the Legislative Assembly about the state of [the province's] finances, including the budget and quarterly updates, and the trends in the provincial and national economies;
- (b) when requested to do so by a committee of the Legislative Assembly, undertake [the] research for that committee into [the province's] finances and economy.

It would also

- (c) when requested to do so by a committee of the Legislative Assembly that is mandated to consider the estimates of the government, undertake research for that committee into those estimates; and
- (d) when requested to do so by a member of the Legislative Assembly or a committee of the Legislative Assembly, estimate the financial cost of any proposal that relates to a matter over which the Legislative Assembly has jurisdiction.

4:40

This independent budget officer would provide financial figures, economic trends and forecasts as well as produce the underlying economic data for the provincial budgets, something that we don't see very often in this Legislature. In fact, I don't think we saw it in this past budget.

Mr. Speaker, simply put, the IBO would be responsible for the independent analysis of both the province's revenue and expenditure streams while appropriately leaving the policy and the programming decisions that affect those streams under the purview of the elected officials, where they need to be. The IBO also, more importantly, would be able to independently begin research on items it deems appropriate and report on them to this

Legislature. The proposed IBO is not a revolutionary idea, not at all. In fact, most parliaments and Legislatures already have an independent budget office. The United Kingdom, the Parliament of Canada, U.S. Congress, and all 50 Legislatures south of our border have independent budget officers. Why is Alberta so different, Mr. Minister? Why don't we have one here, and why did you stand to speak against this bill, Mr. Minister? An independent budget officer has been long advocated for by organizations like the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, both of which have come out in support of this bill.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek once again for putting forward a bill that will help the finances of this province, help Albertans be able to better understand the finances of this province, and have the opposition and Albertans hold this government to account.

Mr. Speaker, today the oft-quoted Mr. Derek Fildebrandt of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said: "If there is just one piece of legislation MLAs should pass right now, Bill 202 is it. An independent budget officer is badly needed to bring Alberta back to comprehensible financial reporting." I'd have to agree with this statement. It wasn't long ago that Alberta became one of the first jurisdictions to make it mandatory to release consolidated budget updates every quarter. Taking that step was a source of pride for the government. It was a key to rebuilding trust with Albertans after an era of reckless spending. Where are we again? Here we are in another era of reckless spending.

By being open and transparent with the consolidated budget numbers, Albertans were able to see and measure how the government managed their finances. Today's PC government has reversed all of the progress that was made. Where Alberta was once a leader in budget transparency, this PC government repealed the Government Accountability Act and has pulled the wool back over Albertans' eyes. They're obscuring the truth from Albertans, and it needs to stop.

We're not reinventing the wheel with this idea, Mr. Speaker, but what we are doing is proposing a way for all members of this Assembly to better represent their constituents. The Wildrose believes the independent budget officer is an important step towards a more reasonable and accountable government and is another example of how the Wildrose is proposing new ideas that put Albertans first.

As I'd mentioned earlier, last year the government repealed the Government Accountability Act. They did that in Bill 12. When that act was passed, in 1995, Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta was a leader. We were the first province in the country to adopt a publicly recorded, results-based, performance-measured framework into our budgeting process. That act was designed to improve accountability between civil servants, elected officials, the government, and the citizens of Alberta. It was so well-regarded by Canadians that other provinces introduced similar legislation, finally with the federal government following suit in 2006, giving royal assent to the Federal Accountability Act.

It is important, I think, Mr. Speaker, to look back at 1995 and really examine what the Government Accountability Act was all about then. The Premier of that day, Mr. Klein, made quite an impact on how finances were done at the time. He epitomized the era. Knowing that Mr. Klein not only led the charge on eliminating the deficit by 1995, back at a time when a deficit wasn't hope, debt wasn't hope, unlike now, when we have this government telling us that debt is hope, it comes as no surprise that he also coined the phrase "the Alberta advantage." Something else that comes as no surprise is that this government has done away with not only his vision of a debt-free Alberta but also in the same breath is destroying the Alberta advantage, too.

What happened in the Finance minister's Fiscal Management Act is that the PC government seems to have us now in a race to the bottom. Future government budgets need no longer list any of the following requirements from the Government Accountability Act's accepted terms of operation: total revenue from all sources, total expenses with breakdown, accumulated debt, planned payments, reconciliation of expenses and revenues for a deficit or surplus; in other words, a dramatic shift away from the reporting of performance measures that we had in past budgets. Wow, what a policy shift. Here we are, back to where we are today, in debt, not that far away from where we were in 1992. What is it going to be by 2016-17? Twenty-one billion dollars of debt, Mr. Minister? That's quite scary. I don't think that's hopeful for the future. That's fearful. That's fearful for the future.

I also have to question where the accountability minister, the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation, is on this piece of legislation. He hasn't stood up to support the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and something that actually would make this government more accountable, more transparent, which is exactly his mandate.

If the government votes down this piece of legislation, where is the commitment to transparency? I don't see it when I look across the aisle here. I don't see it when government members stand up and oppose legislation that is designed to make the books of this province more transparent so that Albertans get a clear understanding of where this province stands.

I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek one more time because this is such an important piece of legislation. This is something that would bring us into line with all the other jurisdictions in North America.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the next speaker, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is always an honour to rise in this House and discuss public policy and to speak on Bill 202 and lend my voice as being in support of this very forward-looking bill.

If you look throughout the direction that many governments have gone, they've gone to bringing in an independent budget officer, which allows them to assess government books and numbers and various practices in an open and forthright way, which has led to a keen sense of both having government understand where the money is going and allowing for great assistance to opposition members to look at government budgets and to look how the money is being spent.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, the independent officer has allowed the average Joe and Jane Citizen to be able to credibly assess spending and revenue streams and the like and assess whether governments of the day are truly getting value for the dollars they have spent.

If we look over the course of time at what we've had here in Alberta, as of late we could really use an independent budget officer. You'll remember, taking us back to Budget 2013, that we had a dramatic change in how the government seemingly managed its accounts. It went from what was considered a very open and transparent fashion, put forward by Mr. Klein and his people, in terms of how much revenue was coming into this province and how much money was spent. It simply allowed individuals to assess in an open and transparent fashion what our true net debt position was.

We see what transpired last year around budget time. The Fiscal Management Act is essentially an act that, in my view, obfuscates

the numbers. It allows government to change its accounting practices from what was I think at one time considered a gold standard – I think I've heard that term somewhere before – in terms of financial accounting, and it really was. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I disagree vehemently with many of the things that were done in this province in the '90s and early 2000s, but none of them were that act. That act actually was a change for the better, a change for open and transparent government.

4:50

There had long been, I guess, rumours and, actually, almost more of a real acceptance that government books from 1985 through to 1993 were not very good, were not very open, were not very transparent, and that the public didn't have a true sense of what was happening in this province. To my mind, that is happening at this time as we speak. You will note that in 2012, when we all left the budget, no opposition party knew the exact number of what our net deficit or even net debt position was. That, to me, is disappointing.

In any event, you know, I think that the independent budget officer proposed in Bill 202 will help us cut through the government spin, will allow us in this House to do our jobs better, will allow government, both people on the front bench and otherwise, to look at things a little more clearly, and will allow for the Alberta people to get a good handle on where their money has been spent.

I support this bill, and my hope is that we all get behind this move towards openness and transparency in this province. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We just have a few minutes left for another speaker, if need be, and then the hon. member will be able to close.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on second reading of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's private member's bill, Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act. This act would create an independent budget officer to provide consistent and nonpartisan analysis of the province's finances, including quarterly updates and the Alberta budget.

This bill is needed now more than ever. In the past two years what was formerly a clear-cut event based on numbers has become a circus, with multiple guesses on the state of Alberta's finances. The Wildrose determined the deficit at \$2.7 billion. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation projected a \$3.9 billion deficit. However, the PC government shamelessly tried to pass it off as a surplus.

So what's going on here? Well, for one, the PC government has decided to mask the nature of financial reporting by splitting capital and operating budgets. By not including capital spending, like we'd done for years, the government is trying to pass off a deficit as a surplus. The result has been various means of determining the real deficit and a general sense of confusion for all. While everyone has acknowledged that revenues were better than expected this year, few are buying the government's perspective on this. The lack of financial clarity speaks to the lack of integrity and honesty of a 43-year-old government, not to any one particular person within this PC government.

The reality is that a deficit is a deficit. Albertans deserve clarity on what happens with their tax dollars. Bill 202 will fix this problem and will re-establish transparency in Alberta's financial reporting. It would provide assurance to businesses and taxpayers.

Bill 202 includes several constructive measures to ensure Albertans get the real numbers they deserve.

The new independent budget officer would provide an independent analysis to the Legislative Assembly about the state of the province's finances. The budget officer could undertake research into the province's finances and economy when requested to do so by a committee and could undertake research on budget estimates for a committee if requested.

In short, the independent officer would constitute an important check on government predictions of revenue and expenditures, thus preventing governments from playing games with the numbers. The officer could become a critical tool of government committees doing vital work on budget estimates.

The idea behind Bill 202 already has some substantive endorsements. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well as the Calgary Chamber of Commerce have echoed the need for such an office. The chamber noted that budget numbers that are credible and widely trusted help businesses plan to prepare their own business plans without the uncertainty of rising taxes, delayed capital spending, and excessive public borrowing.

That's what's at stake here, the credibility of the provincial government, a government that will not provide the real numbers consistently and cannot maintain the respect of its citizens. Businesses and stakeholders base their plans on the projections of the provincial government, and the inability to provide clear direction hurts industry and business.

Bill 202 will bring back credibility to the government's finances. The expense of creating an independent budget office would be very small. Certainly, it would be an investment in the future, with the potential to clear up misunderstandings and foster a culture of financial honesty in the provincial government. For a minimal cost Albertans would reap the benefits of responsible and transparent financial reporting for generations to come.

Such an office would not be unique to Alberta. In fact, all 50 U.S. states have an independent budget officer as does the government of Canada and the United Kingdom. Ontario is currently working on setting up an independent budget office. We can see that the trend internationally and nationally is to support the creating of an independent budget officer.

I hope all members will support this bill and bring the transparency Albertans deserve. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

If there are no other speakers, I'll invite the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take two seconds and say, you know, that I very, very much appreciate the spirit and the intention of the bill and the excellent work that my colleagues have done on this. Two of the reasons why I did join the Wildrose: one is for the value of free votes – that has been resonating very, very well in my constituency – and the second one is for the value of fiscal responsibility.

I took a look at some of the numbers. There are 29 government ministers and associate ministers, the most in Albertan history. There are at least 250 public commissions, boards, and agencies in Alberta, spanning across all ministries. We have seven advocates . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the time for debate has passed.

I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, if she decides to, to close debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and close debate on Bill 202, the Independent Budget Officer Act. I have sat here and listened very intently to the conversation, and I guess what's fascinating to me more than anything is the fact that all of the conversation, all the debate has come from this side of the House, the Official Opposition. You know, you have a government that says that they're open, accountable, and transparent, and they've tried to defend the way they do the budgeting of the books, but we've only had the Provincial Treasurer stand up and speak. Yet we've had comments from members who I have stood up and encouraged to speak.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask for everyone in the Assembly to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Fox	Rowe
Anglin	Hale	Sherman
Bikman	Hehr	Swann
Blakeman	Notley	Towle
Fenske	Pedersen	Wilson
Forsyth		

5:10

Against the motion:

Amery	Horne	Olesen
Barnes	Horner	Quadri
Bhardwaj	Johnson, L.	Quest
Casey	Khan	Rodney
Cusanelli	Klimchuk	Sandhu
DeLong	Kubinec	Sarich
Denis	Lemke	Starke
Dorward	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Fritz	Luan	Woo-Paw
Griffiths	McIver	Xiao
Hancock	Oberle	

Totals:	For – 16	Against – 32
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 202 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with the next item of business, could I get your unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie if you would, please.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend for many, many years – in fact, we've known each other since long before we entered politics – Councillor Amarjeet Sohi. Of course, he's our

councillor for ward 12 – Edmonton-Mill Creek, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and Edmonton-Mill Woods are part of it – a good friend of yours, Edmonton-Manning and Edmonton-Mill Woods, and of many other people here, a tireless advocate for human rights.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I wanted to welcome Councillor Sohi as well. But I am particularly impressed and enthused by the number of people that have come here today to hear the debate on Motion 502, and I would like those individuals to please rise and be welcomed by the Assembly. It's nice to have so many.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and hon. Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, for introducing a number of people who belong to Edmonton-Mill Creek, the riding that I'm happy to represent, including hon. Councillor Sohi. Thank you very much.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Alberta Human Rights Act

502. Mr. Saskiw moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation to repeal section 3(1)(b) of the Alberta Human Rights Act to restore the freedom of speech of all Albertans.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege to rise today and speak on Motion 502, which encourages the government to repeal the hurt feelings legislation that is currently in force in Alberta; that is, to repeal paragraph 3(1)(b) of the Alberta Human Rights Act. At the outset, nothing in this motion deals with discrimination or racism in employment matters, business matters, et cetera. Those protections still exist in the Alberta Human Rights Act and should stay there. Racism and discrimination should never be tolerated.

Motion 502 deals with free speech and only with that specific clause in the legislation. By passing this motion, we'd be following in the steps of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his government. Federally we saw free speech championed by the Member of Parliament for Westlock-St. Paul, Brian Storseth, who is actually a constituent of mine. When Brian was speaking on his federal bill, he said:

Truth is no longer a defence. The person would no longer have the right to due process, the right to a speedy trial, or even the right to a lawyer to defend himself or herself. In fact, in 90% of the human rights investigations under the Canadian Human Rights Act under section 13, the defendants do not even have legal advice, because they simply cannot afford it.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the same is true here in Alberta.

Now, I know that this doesn't happen often, but I do want to point out that this is an area of policy and principle where the Premier and I fully agree with each other, and I do want to point out that the Premier is a well-respected human rights lawyer here in Alberta and abroad. During her campaign for the leadership in the summer of 2011 she stated that she'd repeal the clause, and I trust that her party and MLAs will support her call to action on this.

In fact, she specifically stated, and I quote: freedom of expression must be shielded, and section 3 of the Alberta Human Rights Act should be repealed. That is exactly what the purpose of the motion here today is. The Premier rightfully stated in this regard that freedom of expression must be shielded. Even the Minister of Justice and I agree on this, and we have for some time. Now, I know it's not often that three lawyers can agree on something, but I think it is clear how badly this is needed when so many people in this Assembly can all agree.

This is and should be a motion with broad-based, multipartisan support. There has been a lot of talk recently about hate speech, and I want to be abundantly clear. Hate speech is covered in the Criminal Code. Inciting violence is in the Criminal Code. Discrimination with respect to speech is in the Criminal Code. That is where it should be. That is where it should stay. Those laws should be upheld, and those who violate those laws should be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible.

With the Criminal Code the investigations are done by the RCMP, and they have specialization in this area. With the Criminal Code there are real Queen's Bench judges that adjudicate. The accused has rights such as the presumption of innocence, the right to counsel, and the rules of evidence that apply, and of course if someone is convicted, there is serious punishment that can be applied, including jail time. We are not talking about turning a blind eye towards legitimate human rights violations, and we are not talking about allowing discrimination. We are talking about free speech. Simply stated, we have the right to offend one another without being prosecuted by the state for our beliefs or our opinions.

Now, a lot of people asked me why we need this legislation repealed, and I understand why. Some have done a masterful job of telling Albertans and Canadians that civilization is going to end if we allow free speech, if we allow people to have their own beliefs and values, that we don't need to allow free speech because some people might disagree, and that we don't need freedoms because we, everyday folk, won't know how to make our own decisions. Well, I respectfully disagree. Some often quote reports and figures from the United Nations. I think the universal declaration of human rights is pertinent as it states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Alberta has always led the way in advancing the freedoms, liberties, and human rights of our citizens both at home and around the world. We had the first female magistrate in the Commonwealth. We had the first female MLAs. The first MP of the Reform Party was a woman from northeastern Alberta, and she went on to be the first female leader of the federal Official Opposition.

I'm not going to stand here and pretend that my opinion is the only opinion that matters, and I'm not going to stand here and pretend that no one else is entitled to their own opinion. In fact, I stand here to defend every single Albertan's right to express their own opinions and beliefs and to do so without living in fear of persecution. I don't have to agree with them all the time. In fact, I might be offended by what some people say, but I'm okay with being offended. I want us to live and have free public debate, where people can say things that I disagree with. It's a belief that people have fought for and died for, to ensure that we have the right to disagree with one another. It's the foundation of a free and fair and democratic society.

If we repeal paragraph 3(1)(b), we have the opportunity to make Alberta the freest place in Canada. We have the chance to become

true defenders of liberty and freedom, and we have the chance to make Alberta and Canada a better place for future generations in years to come. As I mentioned, we would be following in the steps of the federal government by taking action, and the beauty of this is that they have proven that it can be done. It is possible to be a defender of free speech and to have free speech and not have your country fall apart. Last I checked, the sun still rises in the morning, and it still sets at night, and life still goes on.

5:20

But what changes is that people are not being called before a state-controlled commission because someone had their feelings hurt. I want you to keep in mind that our justice system is based on the principles of justice and equality, and these state-controlled commissions are not part of our justice system. They do not have to adhere to the rules of evidence, and there are no mechanisms to address vexatious claims. There are no rules of evidence or even of proof. It's just based on what one person says they feel.

This type of clause has no place in Alberta, and it is unconscionable to allow it to continue. I know that we are going to have a lively and fulsome debate this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and I want to point out to my colleagues that when I disagree with them, it's okay. The world is not going to end. And if they disagree with me, I will be just fine. Life will go on.

So if the basic principle of equality and justice applies in this Chamber, why should it not apply to all Albertans? We are no better in this House and we are not extra special, so why is it that Albertans should not have the right to free speech that we are enjoying here right now?

With that, Mr. Speaker, I open the floor to debate, and I trust that my hon. colleagues will hold true to the promise made by their leader, the Premier, to defend the rights of all Albertans by repealing this legislation. It's not often that we as politicians have the opportunity to truly walk the walk, but today we do, and I look forward to having the support of my colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. I first would like to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for bringing this forward. I want to assure him that he offends me every day.

All kidding aside, I do want to thank several people. To the people in the galleries here, to Councillor Sohi: thank you very much for joining us. I also wanted to thank the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for shepherding a free vote on this matter. I've always felt that I can speak my mind as part of the PC caucus, and I will express my opinion here today as well.

Long before I was even elected, the Minister of Infrastructure referred to people in his area when he was a city councillor as his bosses, and that's really had a very strong impact upon me as an MLA. You have to represent your constituents first. You represent your bosses. I've had a lot of e-mails from people in my area on this issue, pro and con, but also a lot of church groups have contacted me.

Now, section 3, Mr. Speaker, is a very complex issue. I recall that the Minister of Education, when we were talking about this, advised me on this matter not to be a lawyer. It is difficult sometimes to unlearn your own profession, but I think that was sage advice from him.

Freedom of speech is one of the cornerstones of a free and democratic society. Mr. Speaker, it is guaranteed by section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which declares that "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication," is a fundamental freedom. It's also subject, though, to reasonable limitations in a free and democratic society, which is section 1 of the Charter.

It was also suggested to me in discussions that we've had to look at what section 3 actually talks about. It deals with a publication, notice, sign, symbol, emblem . . . that

(b) is likely to expose a person or a class of persons to hatred or contempt

because of . . . race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation.

Now, I can say with a degree of certainty that no one in this Chamber stands for this type of discrimination, including me. When I was looking through this, I had a chat with my mother, Marguerite, on the weekend, and she mentioned to me about my grandfather, Phil, who's unfortunately not with us, and his experience in Abbey, Saskatchewan, in the '40s and '50s. With my family being of German descent, Mr. Speaker, they faced significant discrimination at that time even though many of them were already here and fought overseas with the Allied forces during World War II.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there were atrocities committed by the Nazi regime at that particular time, and what happened is that there was a swastika that was painted on my grandfather's white picket fence. People knew of the service that the family was doing, but it didn't stop the prejudice. I remember him talking to me about that as a kid, and I also remember talking to my uncle Jerome, actually one of the teachers of the minister of jobs. When my uncle Jerome was five years old, two older kids put a noose around his neck and, until adults intervened, were prepared to hang him. This type of hatred in the particular community at that time resulted in my family leaving the particular community.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we have respect for diversity of all people's backgrounds. I don't think anyone should ever have to leave their community. Alberta should be open for people of all particular backgrounds or walks of life.

Now, Mr. Speaker, why do I bring that particular instance up? Because it goes way beyond the issue of freedom of speech. I go back to this. If I disapprove of what you say, I'll defend to the death your right to say it: that's Voltaire. I would say, along the same lines, that it's far too easy for any of us to trumpet free speech when we agree with it, only to try to run it down when we disagree with it. I would say to you also that the true test of whether you support the principle of freedom of speech is whether you will defend someone's right to do it when you disagree with what they say.

Now, if I have any difference with the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills today, it's that I wanted to just indicate a couple of stats. Section 3 complaints to the Human Rights Commission are relatively rare. In 2012 fewer than 1 per cent cited section 3. In 2011 there were two. In 2010 there was one. In 2009 there were zero. Most of the complaints to the Human Rights Commission deal with employment practices, accommodations, and services, serious violations of human rights. I support the Human Rights Commission's mandate that people should not have to have a lawyer when they're discriminated against to deal with their particular rights.

That being said, section 3 is an issue warranting debate. I will take us to the Lund decision. This began in 2002 with a letter to

the *Red Deer Advocate*. Let me make it clear. I totally and completely disagree with the writer of this letter and the comments that he had particularly made. This went to the courts throughout almost 10 years. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association intervened. Like me, they didn't agree with the views, but they didn't feel that it warranted sanction at all.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs – we were talking about this once – told me that when examining a legislative change, the first question should be why, and I agree with him. One of the strongest arguments for amending section 3 came from the court itself. In this appeal Justice O'Brien condemned the current wording of section 3 for its language, lack of clarity, and even stated that “lack of clarity will cast a chill on the exercise of the fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and religion.” Particularly troubling to me is the word “likely,” which leads to the lack of clarity.

The Court of Appeal in the same decision wrote:

The objective of statutory interpretation is to discern the legislative intent from the language of the legislation, if possible, and to give effect to such intent. This objective becomes difficult to attain when there is conflict, imprecision, or a lack of clarity in the legislation.

It was further stated that

the citizens of this Province are entitled to certainty when it comes to exercise of their fundamental rights . . . In my view, it would serve the interests of the citizens of this Province if the Legislature would direct its attention to this objective.

Now, this comment from Justice O'Brien clearly gives good reason for the discussion that we're having here today.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills talked about hate crimes being in the Criminal Code. He's quite correct. They're in sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code, and I won't go through that for the sake of time. One thing I will go through is that it says, “Every one who advocates [can be] guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment . . . not exceeding five years,” and it talks about the same groups that we did in section 3. If you look also at the actual case law on it, the *Ahenakew* decision in 2003 or the *Keegstra* in 1990, this section is used.

Another topic worth discussing is whether or not having a section like this works against its intended purpose by drawing more attention to the hateful views of an individual than if they had not been prosecuted. I ask this: would we be talking about the *Boissoin* case today had a complaint not been lodged under this particular section? I'd say: probably not.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association stated in its brief in this case, “Generally, the proper response to speech that is offensive, distasteful, or upsetting is counter-speech,” and I agree.

In many issues I do see the left-right continuum, Mr. Speaker, but not this one. I've had meetings with the Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association and the Sheldon Chumir foundation in Calgary, hardly bastions of right-wing thought, and they have advocated for changes to this section. I'd like to quote the Sheldon Chumir foundation in regard to section 3.

Section 3 can also have a chilling effect on discussion of controversial issues of importance to the public. Leaving the current law in place also means that the human rights commission will continue to be distracted by this debate, which has undermined its authority and led to questions about its existence. No government that believes in upholding human rights would allow this situation to continue.

I'd also mention that I'm not the only one that's talked about this. Here's another quote that I completely agree with and that would sum up my entire argument, Mr. Speaker.

I would suggest that there are provisions in our Criminal Code which deal more effectively with freedom of speech and when it borders on hate crime, and we should leave it in the Criminal Code context. I don't believe this is handled well through our human rights boards. What happens is that people are dragged to these committees for publishing and sometimes saying things which may be abhorrent but that, nevertheless, they are allowed to say. There's a place for them to be taken to task, and it's through the Criminal Code.

Those are not my words. Those are the words of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I think they are wise words and sage advice.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, politics is a team sport. Any one of us could bring forward a piece of legislation, but without others you're going to be the only one voting for it. I've been of this opinion, that I've espoused long before I had been elected to this Chamber. I will indicate that I hope that my words have convinced some of my own caucus as well as the opposition as to why I will be supporting this motion. I welcome the comments of everyone in this debate, even those with whom I may disagree.

Remember first that yesterday was St. Finian's Day. Today is St. Patrick's Day. We're all wearing green today. Let's also have a good time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the leader of the Liberal Party.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to get up to participate in the debate around Motion 502. Let me begin by just cleaning up the name of lawyers. I'm the fourth lawyer involved in this debate, and I will now be the lawyer that does not agree with the other three lawyers. I am very much opposed to this motion, and I urge my colleagues in this House to reject this motion.

We've been talking a lot about what the Court of Appeal in Alberta has said. But more recently, in 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ultimately had to render a decision on similar legislation in Saskatchewan as a result of activities by a fellow named *Whatcott*, who has also, of course, spread his joy in Alberta. In the course of doing that, the Supreme Court said as follows:

Hate speech may often arise as part of a larger public discourse but it is speech of a restrictive and exclusionary kind. Political expression contributes to our democracy by encouraging the exchange of opposing views. Hate speech is antithetical to this objective in that it shuts down dialogue by making it difficult or impossible for members of the vulnerable group to respond, thereby stifling discourse.

Free speech is important but not to the extent that it infringes on anyone else's ability to feel safe or secure. That is what the Supreme Court of Canada has said about this issue.

Now, let's put this motion coming from our friends over there in the Official Opposition in context. This is the third plank, I would argue, of a three-plank effort thus far, through the combined efforts of this Conservative government and the Wildrose opposition, to undermine human rights in this province.

In 2008-2009 we had the introduction of 11.1, the amendment to the human rights code, which, in my view, continues to be a scar on the human rights code in this province. It is unique in the country. It is discriminatory itself, and only in this province do we have it. That came as a result of folks over there in the Progressive Conservative Party listening to their more extreme factions.

Then right on the eve of the 2012 election we had a debate over whether or not our Education Act could possibly be so offensive

to Albertans as to include reference to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in its preamble. On the eve of the election the Progressive Conservative government said: “Oh, that’s outrageous that anyone would object to that. Of course we’re going to put that in.” The Wildrose said, “No, we shouldn’t do that.” Interestingly, after the election the Progressive Conservative government succumbed to the Wildrose, again, those extreme arguments, and agreed: “No. It might be a little offensive to have people in our education system ever feel that they might be needing to follow the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

Now we have this. We have this attempt to eliminate section 3(1)(b). Now, I will acknowledge that this section is not without its complexities, that it is not without some difficulties in terms of its interpretation and in terms of its implementation. That may well be true. But the way to deal with that is not to simply sever it and arbitrarily move forward with, I would suggest, empty rationalizations that all of this can be taken care of by the Criminal Code of Canada. Be clear, my friends: it cannot be taken care of by the Criminal Code of Canada.

It’s interesting. The classic example of how this section has been potentially less than effective is the Lund case, which the Justice minister referred to. I found it particularly interesting because people got so involved in that case because of what I would argue were the very extreme opinions put forward on it by Ezra Levant. I’ve got to say, folks: choose your friends wisely, man. I just don’t know that that’s who needs to be driving your public policy decisions. That being said, he has every right to say what he does say, as do we all, but there is a limit on every right. Interestingly, when the Harper government chose to eliminate section 13 from the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Canadian Bar Association came out and said exactly that. You know what? Every right is only meaningful to the extent that it is limited in the appropriate circumstances, and no right in our country is absolute. Indeed, that is what the Supreme Court of Canada has said about the right to free speech. Again, it is important but not to the extent that it infringes on someone else’s ability to feel safe or secure. That’s what this legislation is geared to achieving.

Let’s talk a little bit about whether the removal of this section could be ameliorated by the existence of the hate crime provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada. First of all, no, because the standard that somebody who is the subject of hate speech needs to meet under the Criminal Code of Canada is much higher than the standard that someone who is the victim of hate speech needs to meet through the human rights code or the Human Rights Commission.

Secondly, the Criminal Code of Canada has a very specific remedy, and there’s not a lot of discretion in it. You convict someone of a crime, you come down on their head like a big hammer, and that’s it, whereas the Human Rights Commission, if it’s properly funded, if it’s respected by the government that administers its legislation, which is a whole other issue in this province – nonetheless, if that is done, then the commission has the capacity and the discretion to engage in restorative justice, in mediation, in efforts to work through those problems that often exist, what is most often just a lack of understanding between two different minority groups within our society and within our communities. So that’s another reason.

A third reason why the Criminal Code of Canada won’t work is because that particular mechanism, frankly, my friends, is much, much less accessible. It is something that is engaged upon at the discretion of the police, not by the victim of the hate speech. Again, it doesn’t work for that reason.

Finally, the Calgary police themselves report that, in their estimation, they only hear about 34 per cent of hate crimes and

hate speech offences. That’s what they’re hearing about, so is that really the place to go? Are they going to have the time and the resources and the effort to do the work that is necessary to grow inclusion, to grow acceptance, to grow mutual understanding in our province? No. That is not the job of the police, and it is not the job of the Criminal Code of Canada. It is something that should be happening through our human rights code, and that’s why our human rights code needs to continue to be respected and why this provision needs to remain inside our human rights code.

Now, in December 2012 Racism Free Edmonton held public consultations on these issues, and they reached out to people from different minority communities, a broad range of different minority communities. I had this wonderful list of the organizations that are represented here in the galleries today, and, of course, being who I am, I have misplaced it in a pile, which is irritating to me because I wanted to read them out because they are so diverse. They represent ethnic minorities. They represent sexual orientation minorities. They represent gendered minorities. They represent income minorities. They represent a broad range of minorities. Those folks came together, and they concluded that section 3 in our human rights code continues to serve a very, very important purpose in our province and that its removal will result in more discrimination, more discriminatory acts, and fewer opportunities to resolve those issues. That’s what they’ve said, and I think we should listen to them.

5:40

That is another point that I’ve come to here. Here we have a motion by the Official Opposition, who think they might get enough support from their right-wing-leaning pals over, you know, in the family. Let’s face it. It’s all a big family between those two. They think they might get enough for this, and then suddenly, boom, if that happens and the government acts on it, we’re just going to eliminate that section of the human rights code.

Now, the fact of the matter is that even though this is a complex issue and even though it’s never easy to balance two rights under our Charter and under our Constitution, where you start that process is by consulting heavily with the interested parties to this. We need to bring in members of all of these community groups on all sides, not even those who are the victims but also sometimes the perpetrators, and that hasn’t been done . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to oppose Motion 502 for a number of reasons. I agree with many of the points that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has brought up. We are a country of immigrants, people from all over the world, who came to this new land in search of freedom and opportunities to escape places where life wasn’t just and fair.

In coming to this new land, I’d like to offer the other members a perspective of somebody who wasn’t born here. Mr. Speaker, it wasn’t that nice coming here in the ’70s. Yes, I loved the snow, and I loved the mountains, and I loved the lakes and rivers in British Columbia. My mother had all of her children get a black eye the first week they came to this country. Many people, new immigrants can experience violence, hatred – as a child five kids beat me up – because of the colour of their skin, because they look different.

Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that the physical violence was actually okay. It was the words. These words may be unparliamentary, but they need to be heard. I’ve been called a

Paki, a Hindu, carpet-rider, turban-twister. “We don’t like your kind here. Go back to where you came from.” Those were the words that hurt the most. They hurt. My parents came to this country to make a better place for their children. We grew up in a war zone, in what today we call the developing world, then a third-world country. Frankly, we actually felt safer in the war zone than we did in the town that I came to. I felt ashamed of who I was. I was ashamed of the colour of my skin. I was ashamed of the culture that I came from. I became a Christian in high school, and I went to a Baptist camp in Caroline, Alberta. The KKK were burning crosses in town. I came to this wonderful province. Some people wanted complete freedom, and they were burning crosses in town.

Mr. Speaker, this is about leadership. Premier Lougheed recognized that this country was changing and recognized that it’s the duty of the majority to protect the new minority, to build a just and fair society. In fact, Laurence Decore fought hard with Prime Minister Trudeau to make this a multicultural country, not just bilingual but multilingual, multicultural. A humble man from Vegreville, one of the greatest leaders this country has had. Premier Lougheed recognized it and put these protections in. Premier Klein recognized it and actually strengthened them even more.

What causes me concern are the two leaders here. Well, out of the four leaders here you’ve got two conservative parties here, and this is where we fundamentally differ. You’ve got the Premier right here, who is a human rights lawyer and issued a directive to her Justice minister – and her current Justice minister agrees with the directive – which is to review or repeal this section of the human rights legislation. This Premier actually put this into a letter to the former Justice minister instructing him to repeal section 3 or review it with intent. This government caucus will actually be divided on this issue, Mr. Speaker, but the real issue is: where does our Premier stand, and where does the next leader, the one looking to be the Premier, stand? The Premier and I differ on this fundamentally, and half of her caucus, or many members of her caucus, will disagree with their own leader on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, for those who come here from across the world, we want to protect freedoms, absolutely. This is why those people escaped. Whether you’re German or Ukrainian or Japanese or Chinese or Indian or African or South American or European or Polish, you come to escape, to protect these freedoms, and these freedoms come with responsibility, responsibility to not promote hatred or contempt. This section says: hey, don’t expose people or a class of people to hatred or contempt. Why would we remove this, dear members of the Assembly? Why would we remove a section that says, “don’t expose people to hatred or contempt”? Also, we must be allowed to walk freely along this country, yes. There’s violence and there’s hatred, yes, but we must be allowed to walk freely without being called bad names and horrible names that promote hatred and contempt.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the police chief are right. Most people here who get discriminated against, who get beaten up already don’t complain despite the protections that are already there. They already don’t. My dad always used to say: “Don’t say anything. This isn’t our country. This isn’t our country. Just lay low. Be quiet.” Mr. Speaker, I gave up my citizenship in the country of my origin, and I became a Canadian. I said: this is my country as much as it is anybody else’s country.

Mr. Speaker, you were there in caucus when I walked out of caucus when I was a member of government. You and the Deputy Speaker came out, and you dragged me back. Yeah, that rumour that one MLA walked out of that room: that was me. Mr. Speaker, you dragged me back in, and thank you, because we filibustered

caucus for a month and we did not let it come to the floor of the Leg. But it is above the floor of the Leg. It is here. We need to talk about other things, other than this.

Mr. Speaker, you know, in Alberta the province used the notwithstanding clause to punish a teacher who had a certain sexual orientation. We’ve got to protect those – you can’t hurt people and treat them unfairly because they’re skinny or fat or tall or short or coloured or not coloured, men or women, their sexual orientation, their sexual preference. This is a debate we ought not to have, but now that it’s here, I urge every member of the Legislature to vote against this.

5:50

Dear members from the Wildrose, I can understand – I can understand – your feeling. Even the Justice minister: yes, we do want to protect these freedoms. But these aren’t cases where – we’re pretty free to say a lot of things in this country. We are. We’re pretty free to say a lot of stuff here, but for a handful of people who go above and beyond to make a point so other people can get physically or emotionally injured or hurt, you know, it doesn’t make sense. This isn’t a Liberal issue and it’s not a Conservative issue; it’s a human issue, Mr. Speaker.

I have so much more to say, but I’ll leave this really short. Every Member of this Legislative Assembly, please, I urge you to vote against this. In fact, I would say that all of those who aren’t coloured in this Assembly, who aren’t visibly different – you know what, I’m not even going to stand up and vote on this, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone else who isn’t a visible minority should be the ones standing up fighting for this. Everyone knows where I stand.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I’d like to thank the Liberal opposition leader for his stirring words, and I do have the highest respect for him and sorrow for what he experienced as a child growing up. There’s no excuse for that in our Alberta.

I only have literally two minutes, but I will say this: my adopted sister, Jián Ài, is from China. She’s Chinese-Canadian. Nothing makes my skin crawl more than racist comments and hurtful comments. I also grew up as part of not a visible minority but a religious minority group, and I can tell you that as many others have experienced deplorable, awful things said about their religion. It is a small minority, of course, thankfully, for where we live, but it is very hurtful. I remember, many times, tears shed in that regard. And I’m sure many people have that experience in here.

I don’t feel that’s what this amendment is for. This amendment does not change what hate speech is in the Criminal Code. It does not change our human rights legislation to do anything that would take away a person’s right to be employed, a person’s right to housing. All of those things that are rightfully protected under human rights legislation stay protected. All this does is make sure that if a religious leader or a media person or someone gets up and says something that might be controversial, maybe even something terrible that shouldn’t be said, the best thing we can do is not haul them in front of a judge, in front of an appointed noncriminal court; the best thing we can do is expose those individuals for the hate-mongers that they are in the public opinion.

That’s the way I think you deal with prejudicial speech, with discriminatory speech. You do not try to crush it; you expose it, and you hold those people accountable in the court of public opinion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We began at this a little late. I believe it was at 5:08. I would request unanimous consent of the House to continue debate past 6 until 6:08, till the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills can make his conclusion.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice has requested that the House go beyond the normal adjournment hour of 6 p.m., to allow sufficient time for this motion to be debated in its full extent, which is 55 minutes, following which five minutes would then be given to the mover to wrap up debate on the motion.

Is that your request, hon. Minister of Justice?

Mr. Denis: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Yes?

We have a point of clarification requested by Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Does it not go with five minutes remaining to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for closing of the debate regardless? I believe it does.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the point here is that I have a list of speakers here who still wish to speak, and if we hit 6:00, automatically we adjourn, as you know. But this is a request to allow another eight minutes of debate by whomever and then five more minutes at the end of that to allow Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills to conclude debate.

Is that sufficiently clear, hon. members? Are you ready for the question?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We will continue on until 6:08, and at that point I will recognize Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills to close debate.

I now have the hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by Edmonton-Centre. Please keep the clock in mind, hon. members.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to speak to Motion 502, and I'll try to be succinct. I'd just like to go straight to raising two issues in particular in consideration of the proposed motion. First is the argument that the criminal justice system is the capable and appropriate mechanism for addressing issues of hate and human rights issues. I believe that the Alberta Human Rights Commission serves an important role that cannot be substituted by the criminal justice system at the current time.

I'd like to quote a paper issued by the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary. The Criminal Code, while legislating against hate crimes, "offers no recourse for hate incidents," or events, which can be clearly hateful but may "not meet the threshold of a criminal offence."

The Alberta Human Rights Commission, by allowing those who have been subjected to hate speech to have their grievances heard, therefore plays a social role in the community that's much different than a formal court system. It is remedial and offers an opportunity for those on the receiving end of hateful incidents to seek recourse and justice.

As the ECCC argues, "The removal of section 3 from the AHRA would serve as the mechanism to silence victims of discrimination and hate." As noted in reports such as the national action committee on access to justice, there are profound systemic and societal barriers to accessing the criminal justice system. The

high cost of accessing the justice system is prohibitive. The nature of hate crimes themselves serve as a barrier to reporting. Calgary Police Service has stated that only 34 per cent of hate crimes are reported to police.

Hate speech uses fear and shame to victimize and intimidate individuals and communities who are already vulnerable. As an example, a graffiti message describing groups in derogatory ways and for them to go home is aimed at reinforcing an outsider status, that they don't belong. Many immigrants in ethnocultural communities already experience those emotions. As marginalized communities they may not feel empowered to voice concerns over these kinds of comments, let alone pursue costly legal actions. Relying exclusively on the criminal justice system necessarily means the exclusion of the same groups and communities who are most vulnerable to hate speech in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, the sense of rejection and exclusion that these types of statements seal on those of Canadian origin, especially the youth, create deep and long-lasting harm and negatively impact their sense of trust, belonging, and engagement with institutions and society as a whole. This is why quasi-judicial institutions like the Alberta Human Rights Commission, which is available and accessible to all Albertans, are so important.

As Albertans we all agree that the views expressed through hate speech are reprehensible, but some argue that the hurt feelings or offences that such speech causes should not lead to the curtailing of the individual right to freedom of speech for everybody else. Mr. Speaker, from the experience and lived experience of the impacted groups, the speech that exposes a person to discrimination, hatred, or contempt causes real harm.

When we discuss hate speech, we also need to understand and recognize that power is not equally shared in our society, that certain groups continue to have more power than others, that men continue to make more money than women, that people of colour are at greater risk of discrimination, that members of the LGBTQ communities are more likely to be victims of violence than straight people, and that people with disabilities face greater barriers to employment than those without disabilities. In the end, hate speech goes much farther than causing hurt feelings for an individual. Hate speech serves to further marginalize and silence groups who are already marginalized and leads to conditions where hatred and violence against minority groups are acceptable.

I'm not going to quote the Supreme Court decision in 2013, but I would like to end by saying that, Mr. Speaker, it is, at the very least, disconcerting if the members' argument is actually suggesting that people should be allowed to do the things that section 3(1)(b) prohibits.

I will not be supporting Motion 502, because section 3 of the Alberta Human Rights Act has built-in protection that prevents the section from being abused or overused or misused, and those protections and limitations also exist in very similar wording in four other Canadian jurisdictions.

6:00

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by quoting from the ECC's position paper on this subject. Legislation like the AHRA and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms "set Canada apart from other countries. They remind us that social inclusion and a celebration of diversity is not an inevitability, rather it [is] something we need to strive towards – something we need to protect."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the request for unanimous consent, the explanation, the clarification took two minutes. That's not part of the debate. So the clock will stop at 6:10, and then we'll go to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills to wrap up.

In the meantime, let's go to Edmonton-Centre, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an important discussion, and I'm glad we're having it. I think it allows us to reaffirm those things that make us distinct as Canadians and distinct as Albertans, and that is our commitment to human rights. I've always believed that it is integral to us to protect the minorities from the tyranny of the majority, and while a piece of legislation or human rights code is really just a piece of paper – I mean, standing in a parking lot, if somebody is going to thump you, a paper is not going to help you very much except in that it's a concept, it's a legal shield, and it certainly gives everyone the opportunity and access to the legal tools that allow you to go to the commission and seek redress for what has happened. That is very important.

Now, I've read a number of different papers that have been written on this. This was a struggle for me. As a social activist the freedom of speech is very important. Why it's so important to me in this House is because I wouldn't have been able to push a number of the policy issues that are so important to me and a number of the freedoms of the groups that I represent, which are so important to me, if I didn't have freedom of speech, particularly in this House, where I've been able to stand up and, as you know, for many years talk about the people that I represent in Edmonton-Centre, seniors and members of the queer community and women. How many times have I represented and stood up for women's issues here in Alberta? That free speech has allowed me to do that.

Ultimately, to me, it's a harms test. I look at a harms test and say: "Okay. Your right to swing your fist around in your free expression ends at the end of my nose." In the same way, freedom of expression has to have a reasonable limit. In other words, it ends at the nose of protection of human rights and protection of those people that need it today. Now, we may well come back here in 50 years – and I'll be delighted if I'm able to come back in 50 years – and maybe we will have reached a point in our society where that's not needed, but that is not where we are today. Therefore, that prohibition against discrimination – in other words, that protection of the groups that are named in the human rights and in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – is integral to moving forward and creating the Alberta and the Canada that we all want. We want to welcome people here. We want people to feel that there is a protection and a welcome for them and that they can move forward in their lives. I want to see that in my city, in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, in my province, and in my country. So, clearly, I don't support the motion that has been brought forward.

Once again, I refer back to the people I represent. They are my bosses. No hard feelings, but the caucus is not my boss; the government is not my boss. Even the Speaker sometimes is not my boss. My bosses are the people that elected me, and I am here to represent them. I love the diversity of my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and I'm going to stand up for it because I think that what's being considered here is a great idea but is not the Edmonton, the Alberta, and the Canada that I want to see, and it is not acceptable now.

I thank you for the discussion, which allowed so many of us to put – you know, it's a head-and-heart argument, this one. For me, it's my heart, and I'm going with my heart in the protection of those people that I want to have around me as I move forward in life.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure I have next.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I stand up here knowing that no matter which way I go on this, I'm going to feel like I'm wrong, but it's my duty in here to say what's on my mind and to try to do the best thing for Albertans. Actually, I'm quite surprised to hear myself agreeing with people that I normally don't agree with on much: the Member for Airdrie, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, and some of what the Member for Edmonton-Centre said.

I will say this. There are two principles that are very important here: the protection against discrimination of those that can be identified. Whether it's colour, race, religion, or sexual orientation, it's not acceptable. The other thing we need to remember is that every November 11 and every day of the year we ought to remember that those people fought for freedom of speech. Neither should be taken lightly.

I'm going to support this. I'm going to do it with some trepidation. I think it's the more right thing to do, but I have to tell you that this is not easy. I'm going to be quick because I think somebody else wants to say something, too.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, you had a spot on the list which was ceded to someone else. Then we have Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It's getting a little bit confusing with all the notes coming and going, so I'm just going in the order as best I can.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. Very quickly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, that we have a right and a very important right of freedom to disagree, but we don't have a freedom to harm. Sometimes rights collide and clash, and we have to recognize that we're talking about a right to harm here, which I don't think we have. We know that speech harms. If it didn't, then this Legislature and Legislatures around the world have wasted a lot of time talking about bullying in the last little while. We know the harm that bullying can do. It causes suicides; it's awful.

My parents chose this country for a reason. My parents along with so many other immigrants left places where it was okay to discriminate, it was okay to single out, and it was okay to do harm. They chose Canada. Now, if Canada has been aggressive on human rights, maybe that's why, because so many of them came here escaping systems of persecution.

Mr. Speaker, this is a province where I want to raise my children and want them to raise their children. Just as I want that for my children, my grandchildren, I want this place to be open and welcoming and accepting of newcomers. Most of all, I want it to be home to them.

I'll stop my comments there.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Bilous: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak. I'm opposed to this motion for a myriad of reasons, and I'm going to try to rattle off our guests that are here from around the province who are also opposed to this motion: the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary; Possibilities in Motion Foundation; Disabilities Action Hall; Men Action Network Calgary; Vietnamese youth group; the Women's Centre; the Women's Centre, Cambodian community; Chilean Canadian Community Association; Faculty of Social Work; HIV

link; Our Nation on Mission Society; Edmonton Multicultural Coalition; Filipino Retirees' Association; the Aboriginal community; and many other organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I hesitate to rise and interrupt, but the time for the debate has elapsed.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you have five minutes as the sponsor of the motion to conclude debate.

6:10

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to request unanimous consent for one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Mr. Saskiw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone today for all of their arguments. I'd like to thank the Minister of Justice, Airdrie, and the Minister of Infrastructure for their arguments in support of this motion, but I'd also like to very much thank the others who were opposed to it, who made very passionate speeches in advocacy for their argument.

In particular, I'd like to thank the leader of the Liberal opposition for being exceptionally passionate. What happened to you and your family is disgusting and appalling. Those, however, are examples of what I believe are hate crimes that should be covered by the Criminal Code, where there is real punishment and jail time that ensues if someone goes that far.

I'd like to address one of the last comments about harm. There are limits to free speech. If there is harm incurred, there are all sorts of laws in Canada that deal with that. There's libel and defamation. If it goes into the realm of being a hate crime, it's the Criminal Code. This motion has nothing to do with speech that causes harm. It's about free speech in Alberta, to have the right to offend another person without being prosecuted.

Of course, one also has to look at the opposite side, where if someone is accused of these provisions, they have no right to a lawyer. They have no right to even know their accuser. There are no rules of evidence that apply, and there are no costs that are applied if the person is found to be innocent, even if it's found that the claim was vexatious and frivolous.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen cases where individuals have been found innocent and have been exonerated but after years and years of going through the process and after hundreds, tens of thousands, and even up to a hundred thousand dollars in legal costs. I believe that those types of serious cases should be before the courts, that there should be the full judicial process, and that if those people are found guilty, they should be punished to the fullest extent of the law rather than going through this other process.

I believe it's for these reasons that the Premier, the Minister of Justice, as well as the Justice critic for the Liberal Party agree with

my position. It's because we have a fundamental agreement that in a free, fair, and democratic society, you have the right to state your opinion and you have the right to say your belief without being prosecuted by a state-sanctioned commission.

Mr. Speaker, I would just close by saying that the federal government has repealed section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. If we as a Legislature repeal section 3(1)(b) of the Alberta Human Rights Act, we would be the freest province in the freest country in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes debate on Motion 502, brought forward by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost.]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Denis	Saskiw
Barnes	Donovan	Wilson
Bikman	McAllister	

Against the motion:

Amery	Horner	Quest
Bhardwaj	Jeneroux	Rodney
Bilous	Johnson, L.	Rogers
Blakeman	Khan	Sandhu
Brown	Klimchuk	Sarich
Casey	Kubinec	Sherman
Cusanelli	Lemke	Starke
DeLong	Leskiw	Swann
Dorward	Luan	VanderBurg
Fenske	McIver	Woo-Paw
Fritz	Notley	Xiao
Griffiths	Oberle	Young
Hancock	Olesen	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 38
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost]

The Speaker: May I just remind you that the Legislative Policy Committee on Resource Stewardship will convene this evening at 7 in committee room A to consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations. Accordingly, the House now stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:27 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 18, 2014

Issue 10

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 18, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. O Holy Creator, fill our hearts with your love, fill our minds with your wisdom, and watch over our actions with your caring eye and guiding hand. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the Hon. Dr. Hedy Fry, who is seated in your gallery. She is accompanied by her assistant, Ryan Cotter, who is seated in the public gallery. Dr. Fry has been the Member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre since 1993, when she defeated incumbent Kim Campbell. She also served as the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development in Prime Minister Martin's government and is now the federal Liberal Health critic. She is here to remind us that it's time to recommit to the Canada health accord, which expires later this year. She has been a vocal, passionate advocate for the rights of women, LGBTQ minorities, and the victims of HIV and AIDS and will be speaking tonight at MacEwan University about sex, gender, and politics. I would ask Dr. Fry and Mr. Cotter to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a great friend of Alberta, the counties of Forty Mile and Cypress, and the town of Bow Island. In your Speaker's gallery is Alan Hyland, who very capably and diligently represented the constituents of Cypress and Cypress-Red Cliff, serving in this Legislature for 18 years, from 1975 to 1993. He then continued to serve as mayor of Bow Island and still is a town councillor. To this day Alan is extremely active in volunteer work, nonprofit fundraising, and advocating for the citizens of Cypress-Medicine Hat, from the 24-hour Wild Horse border crossing to the Alberta eastern trade corridor. Alan has also been a hundred per cent willing to share advice and information with me to help better represent constituents. He does this any time over breakfast at Bobby's restaurant in Bow Island. Alan Hyland, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a very distinguished former member, my predecessor, and my mentor, Denis Ducharme, who is sitting in the members' gallery. I would ask him to rise and accept our warmest applause.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you the 30 sharpest and brightest students of Velma E. Baker school, located in your constituency, Edmonton-Mill Creek. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Lynn Peacock, and four parent helpers. Now I will ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 61 students from Afton elementary. They're accompanied by Mrs. Audrey Letourneau, Mr. Sean MacGregor, and Mr. Scott Slatter. Afton is an arts school, and the young students in Afton would be described as artistic, intelligent, energetic. "Awesome" is another word to describe them. In fact, they coined a new word, "fantabulous." It's a combination of fabulous and fantastic. They're amongst the best and brightest students in our province and our country. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a little secret, if you wouldn't mind keeping it. My favourite school is coming in at 2 o'clock, so if you could all just keep that secret, I'd really appreciate it. There are three classes from Victoria school that are joining us. I tell you, these students are cool, they're smart, they're artistic, they're very with it, hard working, and daring. If you would please welcome them to the Assembly. They'll be in at 2 o'clock, but I'm sure if you welcome them loudly enough, they'll hear it.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there other students or student groups?

If not, let us move on, then, to other guests, starting with St. Albert, followed by the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am so pleased to introduce to you and through you two outstanding women who are amazing advocates for families in my constituency of St. Albert. These ladies are known for their inspiring dedication in supporting and assisting parents and children at the Family Resource Centre, which has been providing preventative family social services in the city of St. Albert for over 30 years. These remarkable ladies are Mrs. Sandy Biener and Mrs. Kristi Rouse. They are sitting in the public gallery. I ask them now to rise and receive the warm acknowledgement of my colleagues in the House.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Wellness, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce some very dedicated professionals who are here in recognition of Nutrition Month. Joining us today are Laura Coleman, who is the former president of the Alberta Pharmacy Students' Association; Doug Cook, who is the executive director and registrar of the College of Dietitians; and Karen Boyd, regional director for Dietitians of Canada.

The College of Dietitians and Dietitians of Canada have set up information booths on the first floor of our Legislature in the rotunda today. They're providing invaluable information on nutrition and its importance in preventing chronic disease. There's

so much more to say, but you can find it all on cookspiration.com, the exciting details. Meanwhile student pharmacists are pre-screening for preventable health ailments such as high blood pressure and diabetes. I just got checked, and I'd encourage all of my hon. colleagues, all visitors to the Legislature, everyone who works here, guests, and staff to visit our special guests here today for a wealth of wellness information.

I would now like to invite all of our guests to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you my guests Dale and Judy Swaré. Judy is a retired banker, Dale a retired teacher. Judy volunteers at five organizations in the community, and Dale has started a second career. Later today I will be tabling a letter that Dale and Judy sent to the Premier underlining the tragic mismanagement of health care in Alberta and how it directly affects the quality of life for people like Dale and Judy. I'd ask them now to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

University of Calgary

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the demand for postsecondary education in Calgary exceeds capacity. Calgary is the largest city in Alberta and the third-largest municipality in Canada. It's also the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country, expected to reach 1.5 million by 2019.

With a young population, demand for postsecondary education in Calgary is also on the rise. Demand at the University of Calgary is increasing as evidenced by the ratio of applicants to the offers of admission. The ratio is the highest of any other peer institution in the province. The University of Calgary received 2.85 applications for every undergraduate student accepted and 4.13 applications for every graduate student accepted in the fall of 2013. Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education estimates that by 2020 there will be a shortage of at least 4,147 spaces at the University of Calgary.

While the metropolitan population of Calgary is 1,214,000, 5 per cent more than metro Edmonton at 1.15 million, postsecondary enrolment in Calgary is 17 per cent less. Facility capacity, current and under construction, is only 69,765, and that is a difference of 17 per cent less than in Edmonton. The ratio of population per postsecondary space in Calgary is 20.3 to 1, and it's 16.6 to 1 in Edmonton, a difference of 18 per cent.

1:40

In order to address the urgent need for more student capacity, the University of Calgary submitted a proposal to expand undergraduate and graduate enrolment by a very modest 1,292 students over five years at an annual cost of \$17.4 million. The proposal would result in increased enrolment in engineering, education, law, medicine, nursing, social work, business, and veterinary medicine and will help alleviate the unmet demand for higher education in Calgary and southern Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by St. Albert.

Member's Decision to Leave Political Party

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was just over four years ago that I made one of the most difficult decisions in my life, and I remember that day vividly, driving up from Calgary to Edmonton for a press conference to announce to my family, my friends, my colleagues, and Albertans that this government had lost its way. It had quit listening to Albertans. After 17 years of sitting on that side of the House, I was leaving the PC Party.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to rehash why I made that decision, but I do want members to know that I have been in the same boat that I know many of them across the aisle are in today. I did not leave the PC Party on a whim. I agonized over it for weeks, and I agonized over it for months. I knew I would be leaving behind a group of people that I had spent much of my life with, people whose families I knew dearly, friends who had gone to bat for me from the day I leapt into politics, colleagues that I stood shoulder to shoulder with during five election campaigns.

I knew that leaving the party wasn't just going to be difficult; I knew it was going to be hell. And for a while, Mr. Speaker, it was. I faced attacks on my character, my integrity, and, worst of all, on my family. Some of these things that were said about me still hurt to this day, but – you know what? – it got better. It got better once I realized that not only had I made the right decision for me, but it was also the right decision for those I was elected to represent.

If you're anything like me, the decision to run for office was not an easy one, but in the end we all took that leap. Now, here we are, sitting in this Chamber, many of you with another agonizing decision to make. Mr. Speaker, I can't tell these members what decision is right for them, but I can tell the ones who already know in their heart of hearts: yes, it is terrifying; no, it won't be easy, and yes, it may get nasty, but, members, it will get better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Family Resource Centre in St. Albert

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize an incredible organization from my constituency, the St. Albert Family Resource Centre. The St. Albert Family Resource Centre and its wonderful, hard-working staff have been providing preventative social services in the city of St. Albert for over 30 years. When the centre started in 1982, there were three individuals. Today the centre has grown to 14 staff and 16 facilitators, who provide a wide range of programs for the families and parents. Not only does the centre serve residents from St. Albert, but many families from northern Edmonton and from our surrounding rural communities also enjoy the great services that the resource centre provides.

To my knowledge, the family resource centre and parent link centres both provide very similar resources and support to families. However, our family resource centre does not receive the same amount of funding and promotion as the parent link centres, which belong to the provincial network. St. Albert Family Resource Centre is funded by Edmonton and area child and family services region 6, St. Albert family and community support services, and the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region. Other revenue is generated through membership fees, fees for service, fundraising, and donations. If the St. Albert Family Resource Centre were able to obtain parent link designation, the centre would be able to expand their programs and make their services more accessible to parents and families.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the St. Albert Family Resource Centre and all their staff for providing invaluable services to the St. Albert community as well as our surrounding communities. It's my sincere wish that the organization will be a part of the parent link centre network in the future as they continue to do amazing work for our families in St. Albert.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Government Policies

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This current crisis engulfing the PC government has its roots in the broken promises by this government from the last election. The PC promise to end child poverty disappeared entirely from the government's budgets, throne speeches, and talking points. The PC promise for stable and predictable funding for postsecondary education went out the window, with a catastrophic budget last year and a half-hearted attempt to make it up this year. The PC promise to protect vulnerable Albertans was utterly shattered two years in a row, with cuts to the seniors drug benefit, services to Albertans with disabilities, and cuts to income support programs.

Mr. Speaker, the PCs deliberately misled Albertans during the election about what kind of government they would be. Albertans had a vision for a better province in the last election, the kind of province where public services would receive stable, predictable funding and increases, the kind of province where action on crucial issues like child poverty wasn't just a cynical election promise but something that we all agreed we needed to take real action on.

Now with the province littered with broken PC promises, all we're talking about in this Legislature is government waste. Now, that suits the Wildrose opposition just fine, Mr. Speaker, because when it comes down to their vision for the province, it really isn't that much different from that of this PC government: same policies, same corporate backers, and the same kind of blatant attempts to mislead Albertans about where they really stand.

But, Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better than either of these conservative parties. Albertans deserve a government that will actually keep its promises and that will definitely stand up for all Alberta families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Health and Wellness Framework

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's population is aging, and the associated health care costs pose a serious challenge to our health care system. Some people call this a social tsunami. However, this challenge is an anticipated one, one that gives us opportunities to respond with a new framework that fundamentally transforms how we approach health care.

Alberta is leading the nation in many ways, as we all know. We are the economic engine of the country. In 2012 we led the nation in employment, creating 87 per cent of the new jobs in the whole of Canada. We also led the nation in population growth, attracting talent from all over the world. We led the nation in quality of life, and we enjoy the highest quality of life index as it stands now.

We have every reason to lead the nation in developing a new health care framework in order to approach health care in a very different way. One possible solution is to take a wellness approach

to sustain our public health care system. According to the wellness foundation the focus of wellness is evidence-based actions that have been shown to avoid or remove the root causes of health care problems. These include addressing numerous well-established risk factors, including physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, tobacco use, alcohol misuse, and preventing adverse childhood experiences and injury.

Mr. Speaker, March is Nutrition Month, and as we speak, our government is hosting nutritionists and student pharmacists with displays in our Legislature, downstairs.

Health care is a shared responsibility among individuals, communities, and governments. Mr. Speaker, we must work together to ensure Alberta's population remains as healthy as possible.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we proceed with the daily Routine and Oral Question Period, I would like to make a brief statement about the rotation for questions during Oral Question Period and also for Members' Statements. Revisions to the rotations are required due to changes in caucus membership pertaining to the Member for Calgary-Foothills and the Member for Calgary-Varsity, who are now independent members of this Assembly.

1:50

Adapting and applying past practices to this current arrangement of independents, the Member for Calgary-Foothills is entitled to question 6 on day 2 of the Oral Question Period rotation. The Member for Calgary-Varsity is entitled to question 6 on day 3 of the Oral Question Period rotation. For each of these sitting days in the rotation the remaining caucuses each move down one position for questions 7, 8, and 9. The PC caucus, which was at question 9, is moved to question 21, and subsequently the Wildrose question moves from question 21 down to question 22. The remainder of the rotation on days 2 and 3 does not change. This will give the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Member for Calgary-Foothills, and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo one question every four days, which replicates the Oral Question Period rotation in the fall sitting of 2013, where each independent member was entitled to one question per week. Hon. members, please be advised that today is rotation day 1, so to speak, in terms of question period.

Now, with respect to the rotation for Members' Statements, this has also been modified to provide for one statement by each independent member every third week. Applying this principle, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is entitled to the first of these members' statements on Thursday, March 20. Calgary-Foothills will then be recognized on Thursday, April 10, and Calgary-Varsity will be recognized on Thursday, April 17.

Hon. members, you will find the revised Oral Question Period rotation on your desks, and I will be distributing shortly to each of your offices a revised projected sitting days calendar to reflect the changes in the Members' Statements rotation, which I just explained.

Now, just before we start the clock for Oral Question Period, please be reminded that you have a maximum of 35 seconds for each question and a maximum of 35 seconds for each answer. I will do my best once again to enforce these time limits as strictly as I can. Finally, be reminded that there are to be no preambles to supplementary questions after main question 5.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let me recognize the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for question 1.

Alberta Health Services Executive Compensation

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services has a new chief executive officer, Vickie Kaminski. She certainly has a difficult job ahead of her, and we wish her well. I'd like to start by giving the minister credit for one thing. We combed through Ms Kaminski's contract and found no evidence of the country-club clause that gave past health executives up to \$15,000 a year in memberships to exclusive clubs. This is progress. Can the Health minister assure Albertans that no current AHS executive has this ridiculous entitlement?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows the answer to this question. I will start off by thanking her for her compliments with respect to Ms Kaminski. We're very much looking forward to her leading Alberta Health Services. As the hon. member also knows, I asked Dr. John Cowell, the official administrator of AHS, to undertake a comprehensive review of executive compensation. That review has been made public. In addition to prescribing set salary ranges, it eliminates bonuses . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is one aspect of Ms Kaminski's contract that we do find concerning. In the real world executives are normally given severance of one month's pay for every year of service, yet she'll be entitled to severance of one month's pay for every month of service to a maximum of one year. Now, we like the fact that there is a maximum, so thank you for taking our advice on that, Minister, but doesn't the Health minister see that taxpayers are annoyed at paying rich severance packages to Health executives who only last for a few months?

Mr. Horne: You know, Mr. Speaker, what I think Albertans will come to appreciate very quickly is that they will be thankful that it wasn't left to the Official Opposition to recruit a senior leader for Alberta Health Services in this province. If that were the case, we would not have someone of Ms Kaminski's calibre joining Alberta Health Services. This is the CEO of the fifth-largest employer in the country, the largest health care organization in Canada, certainly larger than in many developed countries. These are appropriate terms and conditions for this appointment.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the minister had quite a time convincing somebody to take this job, so I guess we should count ourselves lucky that we got somebody in it.

Speaking of severance, though, even though Alberta Health Services has a new CEO, I want to ask about the former CEO Dr. Chris Eagle. He resigned from his post in October, but he said that he was going to stay on with AHS until this fall doing, quote, special projects. Now, I suspect this was just a way to mask the fact that he was being paid a \$580,000 severance, but I could be wrong. Could the Health minister explain in detail the specific projects Dr. Eagle is working on and what . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the greatest challenge in recruiting senior-level health talent to this

province is the hon. members opposite and their constant undermining of Alberta Health Services and also the front-line staff that deliver care in this province. The hon. member knows full well the terms and conditions surrounding Dr. Eagle's departure. He was a product of an earlier era that provided for much more generous severance packages than we see today with Ms Kaminski. He is involved in some high-level, senior projects within the organization, and he is working out that notice period, not being paid . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: I'd love to know what those high-level projects are, Minister. We'll try again another day.

Mathematics Curriculum

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, parents across Alberta are demanding that this government end its failed experiment in new math and get back to basics. International and national assessments have our children's math scores dropping. The government's failure to teach our kids basic math has resulted in Alberta math scores continuing to head in the wrong direction. Meanwhile, the minister continues to ignore the outcry from parents. Why won't he just restore the practice of teaching basic math skills to elementary school children in Alberta?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, day after day we get the same question, and we give the same answer. The answer is that we will, and we are. It's not a matter of old rote memorization versus inquiry-based methods of teaching. When we're talking about curriculum, we're talking about the what, not the how. What they're saying is that they don't trust teachers. They don't trust teachers to decide which methods work best for which kid. When we talk about curriculum, we're talking about what we're teaching and the objectives of that education system, not necessarily the teaching methods.

Ms Smith: The problem is, Mr. Speaker, that teachers are complaining, too. A recent *Edmonton Journal* blog quoted an analysis by a teacher and former principal in Edmonton's public school system. He says, "The City University of New York conducted a meta-analysis of 164 studies on discovery learning. [It] concluded that 'unassisted discovery does not benefit learners.'" The minister is ignoring top teachers who warn that this government is gambling children's futures on unproven theories. Will the minister restore the practice of teaching basic math skills to elementary school students in Alberta?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, once again, they can't take yes for an answer. I said that we will, and we are. But it's not one or the other; it's both. As any teacher in the classroom will tell you, they need the latitude, they need the flexibility to decide how to reach each kid. This isn't just about rote memorization. Maybe they'd like us to remove the smart boards and bring back blackboards. A year ago they didn't believe in climate change either, so maybe there's hope that they'll evolve on this as well.

Ms Smith: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. They aren't, and they don't. As noted in a *Calgary Herald* column today, government education propaganda states, "We're preparing (Alberta students) for a future we can't imagine, and giving them the tools to succeed in work that doesn't yet exist." Apparently, the minister believes that in the future Alberta students won't need math skills. The minister

should just admit that his department's approach to teaching math has failed. Will he restore the practice of teaching basic math skills to elementary school students in Alberta?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, on one hand they want us to change the curriculum, but on the next hand they don't support curriculum changes. We've just said that we're in the middle of a curriculum redesign, and part of that redesign is to reinforce the fundamentals, numeracy and literacy, and have those woven through all pieces of the curriculum. Yesterday they questioned our support of the trades. Well, Inspiring Education is calling for dual crediting, where we're bringing trades in, and we've got dual crediting going on in postsecondaries, industry, NAIT, and the polytechnics. Guess who's on those advisory groups for the curriculum? It's the Building Trades of Alberta, it's NAIT, it's the employers, but they don't support . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Greenwood, your third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Our kids need to memorize the times tables, and that just ain't happening.

Disaster Recovery Program Administration

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, back to the disaster of the disaster recovery program. Here's a story of how LandLink is dealing with the minister's order to start closing files. Richard Murray of High River started repairing his home on September 23 after getting permission in writing from LandLink to do so. He followed every step required and kept LandLink in the loop throughout. He was told on November 23 that all of his paperwork was in order, so he waited for payment. On March 11 he got a phone call from LandLink. His claim has been denied in full without explanation. Is this how the minister intends to close all . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:00

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows flat out that that's an outrageous – outrageous – statement. There have been almost 4,700 payments to individuals, totalling \$48 million, since this disaster recovery program started. You know, if there are individual cases, I encourage the hon. member to share them. We will put them into the system and make sure that they're reviewed. I encourage individuals who have a concern with the DRP file to go through the appeals process as well.

Ms Smith: What's outrageous is that this minister still hasn't fired LandLink.

Richard Murray's circumstances are not unique. All over southern Alberta homeowners victimized by the flood are being revictimized by LandLink. We're now getting multiple reports that if a homeowner challenges or appeals any part of the DRP process, all DRP payments are put on hold. If you think the DRP got one little thing wrong, you get no further money or anything until the dispute is resolved. That makes me think that LandLink is being paid commission on the money that they don't pay out. To the minister: is LandLink being paid to shortchange flood victims?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, that is actually a very irresponsible statement. You know, this government is committed to supporting Albertans in ways that no other province could ever afford to do. We will be there for Albertans. We'll deliver through the disaster recovery program, and we will ensure that Albertans are looked

after. If there are concerns that individual Albertans have, there's a process by which it will be resolved. We're here to see it through for Albertans.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, if there was nothing to hide, he would table the contract, and I've been asking him to do that.

This government has called last spring's flood a \$6 billion event, yet in the community where more homes were destroyed than in all the other communities combined, less than \$23 million has actually flowed through to homeowners who were devastated by the flood. The people most hurt are seeing nothing, but there seems to be plenty of money for companies that manage to score sole-source contracts from the government. To the minister: how much has LandLink been paid so far as a result of the 2013 floods?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to table that information in this House. My understanding is that the administrative cost of delivering the disaster recovery program is in the order of a magnitude of 11 per cent of payout. That actually compares very favourably to the insurance industry, which is an over 20 to 25 per cent cost for delivering the payout. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to make that information available, and we'll go right back the last 20 years of DRP payments and make that information available.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Flood Recovery Communications Contract

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of contracts, after the flood Alberta Liberals called for a special auditor to conduct real-time monitoring of flood recovery related expenses. The Premier refused, and now we know why. Our FOIP request revealed that Executive Council, the Premier's own ministry, gave a quarter million dollar contract for flood recovery communications advice to Navigator, a PR firm headed by a long-time PC campaign strategist, Randy Dawson. To the Premier: where is your judgment? Why did you use public money to reward such an obvious PC insider?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's not about reward; it's about communicating. It's about having Albertans understand what's happening at a time of very high stress for Albertans. Albertans want to know what's going on. When the floods were on, people needed to know what was happening, when it was going to happen, and how their issues and concerns were going to be taken care of. That requires people to come to the table immediately, to work hard, and that's what this government did.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, a quarter of a million dollars: that's a lot of money.

Mr. Speaker, you'll have to forgive Albertans for being skeptical given previous lapses in the Premier's judgment with Tobaccogate, Travelgate, and now this. The nature of this contract raises some very serious questions. Was there a competitive tendering process? What services were so unique that they could only be provided by this one PC-led PR firm? To the Premier. You have the highest priced Public Affairs Bureau in the country. Why was this contract necessary at all?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, when the flood happened, this government mobilized quickly and addressed the concerns of Albertans, moved immediately to help Albertans who were in need and to make sure Albertans who were under stress under-

stood that the government was there and was going to work with them to deal with those issues. We mobilized immediately. We did what we needed to do to make sure that Albertans were well cared for during the most difficult time in their life.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it seems like they're addressing the concerns of a PC insider, not the very people who needed the help.

One of the very few obligations listed in this quarter million dollar contract was to provide logistical support for the half-day flood symposium. Interestingly, during Alberta's centennial the Public Affairs Bureau managed to do a fine job of co-ordinating the logistics for something as minor as Her Majesty the Queen's royal visit. To the Premier: if the PAB is good enough for royalty, why isn't it good enough for you and your government?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a classic case of people who think that they can govern by looking in the rear-view mirror and analyzing everything that happened in the context of what they think today. [interjections]

What happened in June of 2013 was that Albertans faced the most massive natural disaster that's happened in this province and perhaps in North America. This government responded; our Premier responded. Albertans knew, because we responded, that their issues would be taken care of, and they were taken care of. We recovered from this disaster better than any other place in North America. It was a big disaster, but Albertans knew that their government and their Premier was there.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Could we please cut out the interjections? They're really not necessary. They're coming from both sides, and that's enough.

Let's move on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is transit operator appreciation day, and I know they get as much respect as electricians on the other side of the House.

Government Work Plan

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are interested in the Premier's work plan and what's in it. Does the work plan given to the Premier by her party include steps to reverse cuts to PDD programs, to poverty reduction or the seniors' benefit or to bring down the price of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that it's not necessarily appropriate or within the rules to talk about party politics in the House, but I can tell this hon. member that the plan that this government has, this party has, this Premier has, and this caucus has is to work hard for the next two years to ensure that we continue to have the opportunity to provide good government for Albertans each and every day.

Mr. Mason: Good luck with that, Deputy Premier.

Does the work plan involve keeping the Premier's election promise for affordable child care? Or how about the promise to eliminate child poverty in five years?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, while developing a platform is a very important role of the party and talking with party members about what should be in that platform is a very important role of the party, perhaps the hon. member would like to know that door-knocking in his constituency might also be a very important part of that plan. This government, this caucus, and particularly this

party, because he's raising party business in the House, likes to plan to listen to Albertans, to work with Albertans, to address the issues of Albertans while we build the future of Alberta and work with Albertans to develop the kind of place where our children and our grandchildren can live and work and raise their families.

Mr. Mason: Well, good luck with that, Mr. Deputy Premier.

Does the Premier's work plan include measures to clean up the tailings ponds in the oil sands or to keep jobs here by refining more bitumen in Alberta? Or how about repealing bills 45 and 46? Albertans want to know.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member continues to want to talk about a so-called work plan from a party perspective, but let me talk about a government perspective. This is a government who builds Alberta. This is a government who builds forward, who looks for the opportunity to create the kind of place where Albertans can live and work and raise their families in Alberta, trade out into the world, a place where it's the best place in North America, perhaps in the world to live and to raise your family. That's the kind of Alberta we want, that's the kind of work plan we have, and that's how we're working going forward, focusing on the kind of place where people can have a quality of life and raise their family, get their education, and really pay back as the citizens of our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

2:10 Infrastructure Maintenance and Repair

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government loves to talk about the so-called building Alberta plan. What it doesn't speak to is the unacceptable job it is doing on maintaining Alberta; that is, ensuring the facilities that we already have don't fall into disrepair. A FOIP – I love those FOIPs – of Alberta Infrastructure shows over a dozen health facilities listed in poor condition. These are just a few that we know of right now. How can the Infrastructure minister ensure that a government busy putting up flashy Building Alberta signs isn't forgetting about the critical infrastructure that we need today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? The fact is that we work with Alberta Health Services all the time, get their advice on which buildings need to be repaired. We work with the list they give us. They do the repairs. We monitor to make sure the money gets spent where it's supposed to. We'll continue to do that because that's how we actually keep things in good order. If the hon. member actually has examples of places that she genuinely feels are in bad repair, we'd of course be happy to hear about that.

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, I have them, Mr. Speaker. Lots of them.

Given that residents in Boyle are concerned about losing health services in their community after a four-year Alberta Health Services plan to repurpose this facility into a primary care clinic was shelved, can the Minister of Infrastructure ensure residents that they won't lose local services altogether by consolidating them all within 50 kilometres?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member will know, responsible planning and delivery of health care services involves looking at all of the services in geographical areas across the province, ensuring that we're making the most of the equipment

and the staffing and the facilities that we have available, and that means centralizing some services in appropriate areas within those geographical areas, which we call AHS zones. We'll continue to do that work. The residents of Boyle can be assured by this government that they'll continue to have access to all of the health care services they need just as their neighbours across the province do.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Minister, let's try another one. Given that the Wainwright health centre, according to Alberta Health Services, has deteriorated to the extent that continued safe building operations cannot be taken for granted and given that the facility – now, listen to this one – is at risk of being shut down if further sewage system failures occur, why after at least four years of being on Alberta Health Services' priority plan has this government not taken any action?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, Alberta has the highest number of hospitals per capita than any other province in this country bar none, 99 approved hospitals. We have proposed in Budget 2014 a capital budget of \$2.6 billion covering 24 projects. The issue of infrastructure maintenance is an issue in every province in this country. We provide for that in our budget. We have more work than most provinces because of the number of hospitals that we're working with. The quality of care in this province is not in question and should never be in question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Livingstone-MacLeod.

Highway Maintenance and Rehabilitation

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A robust transportation system is vital for all Albertans, whether they need to get products to market, to get to and from work, to get their kids to school, whatever. Over the past number of years this government has invested billions in major capital projects like building the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads or twinning highway 63, but many Albertans worry about the condition of the highways and bridges that we already have. To the Minister of Transportation: what is this government doing to make sure that Alberta's existing highways infrastructure, especially secondary highways like 661 in my Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to this member for always advocating on behalf of rural Alberta. Budget 2014 is great news for Alberta's smaller roads and highways and bridges. Over the next three years we've allocated \$735 million for highway rehabilitation. That's an increase of \$284 million from Budget 2013. We'll be able to rehabilitate 2,500 kilometres of highways in Alberta over the next three years.

Ms Kubinec: To the same minister: how are these rehabilitation projects prioritized, and how can municipalities know that projects in their communities are on the list?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my department has a very technical method of measuring highway condition based on pavement roughness. Once highway condition has been determined, it is placed on Alberta Transportation's three-year construction program. Where it falls in that program depends entirely on the condition of the pavement, and safety is the number one reason for

looking at these conditions. Safety is always our number one consideration when determining projects in our three-year plan.

Ms Kubinec: To the same minister: is this renewed focus on maintenance and rehabilitation enough to clear the backlog of projects that has built up over the last several years?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has more than 28,000 kilometres of paved provincial roads. With a network this vast we'll never be done rehabilitating roads in this province. It's true that when times were tough over the last few years, we had to make some tough decisions with respect to rehabilitation and maintenance, but the extra \$284 million dollars in this year's budget will go a long way to catching us up on that.

The Speaker: Livingstone-MacLeod, followed by Red Deer-North.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Cost

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Finance minister let the cat out of the bag when he said that the southwest ring road project will cost \$5 billion. Calgary residents need this project, but they want it at the best possible price. Yet it's been reported that the \$5 billion could produce three replica south Calgary hospitals. To the Minister of Transportation: if the 46-kilometre Stoney Trail east freeway cost \$1.4 billion, why in the world is the 41-kilometre west and southwest ring road projected to cost a whopping \$5 billion?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I thought I might take this first piece because I understand that the *Calgary Herald* is quoting a statement that I made at a chamber of commerce luncheon some couple of weeks ago. The \$5 billion number was an estimate that we used during the discussions of the ring road that is going to be happening. As I mentioned in the speech to this House on the budget, this is an agreement that took 50 years in the making to work with the aboriginals and First Nations, to work with Calgary residents, to work with the municipalities. The hon. member knows that this is a very important project not only for Calgary but for southern Alberta, to move those through. We anticipate that it's going to be around . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the Minister of Finance already announced the cost of the project at \$5 billion and given his government is considering a P3 to build and finance it, then how does the Minister of Transportation plan on getting the best possible value from bidders when he's already let it slip how much money is in the envelope?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, this is quite hilarious. Last week they were trying to get me to commit to a number. Now that we have, they're saying that we shouldn't have, but in fact it was the minister of Treasury Board that came out with that number. That's the reason I didn't want to come out with that last week. The \$5 billion is a rough number. Until we put it out for tender and have the bids come in, you can't have an exact number.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that it's four times the other one, you've got to wonder.

To the Transportation minister, then: given that this government said that it was considering a P3 to build this ring road project, if

the government doesn't get any bidders, like what's happening to the schools, what's your plan B for this?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, there you go with speculation again. I'm quite confident we'll get lots of bidders on our P3 project on these ring roads. We've always done that. We've built pretty well all the ring roads around Edmonton and Calgary under P3s, and we've saved the taxpayers of Alberta over \$2.5 billion building P3 roads.

Penalties for Drinking and Driving

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm outraged that a young man under the age of 18 can have a 24-hour suspension for drinking, two 30-day suspensions for driving while impaired, an impaired driving charge that is thrown out of court, and still be allowed to carry on drinking and driving until he finally kills a hard-working, responsible citizen of Red Deer. When a person continues to drink and drive and kills someone, this is not an accident; it is vehicular homicide. The bereaved family is then made to feel that the justice system is more concerned with the rights of the killer than it is with rights of the innocent victim and his family. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: how can a young man . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First off, I want to thank this member for her tireless advocacy on behalf of victims of drunk drivers. Thank you very much. It's very important to me as Justice minister that we always put our victims first, and that's why I'm also very happy that we've introduced legislation that prevents future victims. Now with new legislation if you have a graduated driver's licence, as did this gentleman, if there's any blood-alcohol level at all, there's an immediate 30-day suspension and an immediate seven-day vehicle seizure. I'm very proud of this government's record on this drunk-driving file.

The Speaker: Thank you. I'm assuming this is not sub judice, then.

Mr. Denis: No.

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister, for clarifying.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. He did have a graduated driver's license.

How is it possible that a person in Calgary is killed by a man who's had three previous drunk-driving charges? Is there no way that we can stop these drunk drivers and get them off the road?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you say that this is not sub judice. It's sounding like it is, but proceed if it isn't.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As this member had mentioned, this is a Criminal Code issue, and I've advocated time and time again to the federal Justice minister, the Hon. Peter MacKay, at our meetings that there should be mandatory minimum sentencing for drunk drivers who cause death or serious bodily harm. I know this member supports that. It's time for the opposition, Wildrose, to join us in this particular fight.

Mrs. Jablonski: Same minister. Why are there no minimum sentences for someone who is driving and drunk and commits vehicular homicide? Why don't we have minimum sentences?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, that's a great question because I feel that there should be mandatory minimums for drunk drivers who actually kill someone or cause serious bodily harm to somebody. You know, a couple of years ago when we were at the doors talking about our strong record on this particular file, there were members opposite that kept on setting up beer coasters, these little beer coasters mocking victims of this particular issue. It's time that we stand up against drunk drivers.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Airdrie, your point of order has been noted at 2:22.

Let us move on to Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Legal Aid

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A publicly funded legal aid system is essential to our democracy. It ensures that even if you can't afford a private lawyer, you can be represented in court with assistance from legal aid except in Alberta. When I asked the minister a question last week, he seemed more intent on blaming the feds than in answering the question, so I'll try again. To the Minister of Justice: why is the Justice ministry funding legal aid so meagerly that people on assured income for the severely handicapped cannot qualify?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, legal aid is a very valued service, but it is an independent society, and it sets its own independent criteria. I say again that this government continues to fund legal aid. For the federal government it's time to step up. We fund over 80 per cent of legal aid in this province, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much. Does the Minister of Justice not see the connection between provincial government funding of this program and the cut-off criteria that legal aid has to apply?

Mr. Denis: I definitely agree with this member. There's a connection with the federal government's lack of funding of the legal aid program. We fund over 80 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to fund this amount for vulnerable Albertans and for providing access to justice through legal aid.

Ms Blakeman: It appears he doesn't want his job, wants to give it to the feds.

Well, back to the same minister: could the minister please explain what mentally disabled recipients of the assured income for the severely handicapped should do if their AISH benefits cause them to make too much money to qualify for legal aid or a single mom working full-time on minimum wage who also makes too much money to get legal aid assistance? What would you recommend they do?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the Legal Aid Society of Alberta sets its own criteria. We'll continue our funding of legal aid. We'll also continue our advocacy for the federal government to live up to its obligations.

Calgary School Infrastructure

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, many families move to mature neighbourhoods because of their access to local community

schools, yet year after year this PC government refuses to fund routine maintenance and upkeep in our existing schools, turning simple fixes into major repairs. Today because of this government's neglect, Edmonton Catholic school board is forced to vote on the closure of four mature neighbourhood schools that they can't afford to repair. To the Minister of Education: why do you insist on punishing mature schools in mature neighbourhoods?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth with respect to what this member is saying. Edmonton Catholic is not voting on closing schools because of the disrepair of the schools; they're voting on amalgamating students into one location because they think it's potentially in the best interest of the students with respect to programming. That's what we're here for. We're here to deliver education, not to manage buildings. I don't disagree with the member in terms of that I wish we could give them more money to maintain their buildings. But the truth of the matter is that there are also large capital reserves across the province. At the end of the day we're interested in instruction and programs and opportunities, and sometimes that means operating a building has to come . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that creative programming like the sports program Edmonton Catholic brought in at St. Mark can attract parents to mature neighbourhood schools and given that St. Mark narrowly avoided closure last year but now enrolment has increased by 30 per cent, why doesn't the minister support schools boards, parents, and teachers who have creative solutions to avoid school closures?

Mr. J. Johnson: It's a great question, Mr. Speaker, and that's why I'm very happy that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought the parents and the school board in to meet with me some time ago to talk about this situation. I commend the school board for taking on this challenge, because it's a difficult decision. That's one of the reasons why under this Premier we stepped forward and provided money ahead of time for that school board so they could have certainty that when they go out and develop those programs and develop those creative opportunities and make those tough decisions, they know that this Premier and this government will stand behind them and that we'll provide the funding so they can deliver the best programs possible.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Still closing schools, Minister.

Given that the Calgary board of education's new capital plan asks for over \$300 million in school modernizations alone and given that over 19 of those modernizations have been requested by the board for more than five years, will the minister commit to funding these modernizations before more Alberta schools are too costly for repair?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think this member agrees with me in that we elected the right Premier and that's why we've got such a strong investment in the schools and the infrastructure. We've never had such a big capital program for education, and that's due to one person, the person that was talking about it during the election. This is the only party that was talking about that during the election. She's to be commended because we delivered on it

with 50 new schools and 70 modernizations, and we'll continue investing in that capital.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by St. Albert.

Postsecondary Noninstructional Student Fees

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year hundreds of millions of dollars in operating grants are given to postsecondary institutions, and taxpayers have an expectation that those funds are used to provide basic services to students. The reality is that mandatory noninstructional fees are being charged to students for such basics as safety or academic advising or hallways as a way to work around the tuition cap. To the Deputy Premier: how are taxpayers receiving value for their investment in postsecondary when the basics aren't even being covered?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that the hon. member's assumptions are actually wrong, first of all. We fund the postsecondary system in this province quite well compared to other jurisdictions, and we get good-quality education as a result of that. We also get a lot of student spaces as a result of that. Now, is there more demand? Always. Are there more things that can be done? Always. Are there different things that could be done? Always. So postsecondary institutions look to their finances – they have boards – to determine how they're going to finance the things that they want to do on their campuses to be the best that they can be.

Mr. Pedersen: Given that this PC government all too often uses fee hikes and service charges as an easy escape instead of working hard to reduce red tape and get spending under control and given that we are hearing that noninstructional fees are now being used to cover academic salaries, how can Albertans be confident that this minister is up to the job of making sure taxpayers are getting the best return on their investment in postsecondary education?

Mr. Hancock: Well, if the question is how Albertans can be sure that this minister is up to the job, they only have to look at this minister's record of 17 years in this House and seven different departments without much in the way of public profile in the newspapers. As I used to say during the leadership process that I ran in: the reason you don't hear about me is because I never screwed up anything. There may be another explanation that somebody else wants to give of how Albertans can be assured that this minister is competent to do his job, but I'm satisfied that I come to work every day and give my best in that particular effort on behalf of good relations.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Second supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ontario is the only province with a higher cost for an undergraduate education, why hasn't the minister gone to greater efforts to rein in mandatory noninstructional fees and reduce the cost of obtaining a postsecondary education for Alberta students?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this is actually a very serious topic. Every Albertan needs to be able to advance their education when and where they want to do it, and we have to ensure that finances are not a barrier to a student getting an education. Now, education is still the best investment that an Albertan can make, and we need

more Albertans to be looking to invest in their education right across the spectrum, whether it's a PhD or whether it's a trade or whether it's technology. We need Albertans to be educated. We work every day with our postsecondary system to make sure that those spaces and places are available at an affordable price for Alberta students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Parenting Resources in St. Albert

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A major component of the building Alberta plan is to build strong families and communities. The development of parent link centres in Alberta shows that our government values and invests in families and children. However, the city of St. Albert remains one of the few Alberta cities without a parent link centre. To the Minister of Human Services: can you please explain why my community of St. Albert does not have a parent link centre?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be quite honest, I wish I could have parent link centres in every single jurisdiction in this province because they provide very, very valuable resources. We have recently announced some new parent link centres – I did that in January – and they're based on the early development index. On this index we look at a series of different things and essentially see the progress that children have made when they enter kindergarten. St. Albert is a jurisdiction where children are actually entering kindergarten with a very, very strong footing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that St. Albert and surrounding communities are not assigned to any specific parent link centres, how can your ministry ensure that families and children in St. Albert are able to receive the services and programs they need?

Mr. Bhullar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member is very, very passionate about the work of the St. Albert Family Resource Centre, and I know we have Sandy and Kristi from the centre here today. That's one example of some of the great resources that are available in the city of St. Albert. The member is a very strong advocate for his community, and I will ensure that we continue to work together to see how we can better the services.

Mr. Khan: I do appreciate the kind words about our fabulous St. Albert Family Resource Centre.

To the same minister: given that the St. Albert Family Resource Centre has been providing preventative social services in the city of St. Albert and providing for surrounding regions such as Edmonton and our rural communities for over 30 years, will the minister please designate the St. Albert Family Resource Centre as part of the parent link centre?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would welcome the member to spend some time and effort with myself, and we can see what additional services we can add on. Essentially, some of this evaluation comes down to, unfortunately, limits on financial resources. There are some communities that rank in the high 20s and 30s on the early development index whereas St. Albert ranks

down towards 15. Now, that means that the community has got some good things going for it. We want to support that, so I'll work with the member to see how we can advance services in St. Albert.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Strathmore Search and Rescue River Access

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall my constituency received some very disappointing news. Alberta Transportation sent the Strathmore fire hall a letter informing them that the department would be closing the boat launch on the highway 24 bridge. Since my meeting with the former Minister of Transportation last November, the department has fenced off the property and installed cement barriers along the riverbank to prevent boats from launching. Now, the obvious concern is that there are no launch sites for emergency service to this section of the Bow River below the Carseland weir. Why has the current Transportation minister not ensured that at least search and rescue will have access to the boat launch area?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know all the details of this particular project – there are a lot of projects in Alberta Transportation – but I will do some research on it. I do understand that it was not a legal boat launch, and my department is working with them to find an alternative method that will better suit their needs.

Mr. Hale: I have pictures from 2006, when it was a boat launch. You did the work already.

To the same minister: in relation to safety concerns, given that there is currently no immediate access to the river south of the Carseland weir and, again, given that most of the Strathmore search and rescue missions are on this side and that the closest boat launch is 30 miles away on the Siksika reserve, why has this government failed to make river access a priority and now put people's lives at risk?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, he might have a picture of a boat launch, but it wasn't an approved boat launch, and it wasn't permanent.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're working with them to try and find a more suitable situation for them to do their operations, and I'll continue to do that. You know, to know everything in this House off the top – if he has more specifics, it would be nice if he sent me the specifics ahead of time.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did talk specifics with the previous minister, and I would have hoped that he would have put this on your table because it is public safety. It's public safety.

Given that Wyndham provincial park is adjacent to this site and has the capacity for a boat launch and that, obviously, the Transportation minister doesn't seem to be too worried about this, will the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation take the initiative and build a boat launch at Wyndham to ensure search and rescue have access to the water?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question. Indeed, one of the things that, of course, was tragic about last summer's floods was the degree of devastation and damage that was caused throughout southern Alberta, not the least

of which was to our parks system. One of the, perhaps, opportunities this gives us is the possibility of relooking at the various functions of the various facilities and infrastructure we have in that area, including our provincial park system. If a boat launch is something that perhaps could be incorporated to provide both recreational opportunities as well as emergency services, I think that, actually, that's a good idea, something we could take a look at, and we will investigate it during the course of the rebuild.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Public Service Pensions

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to receive many calls from my constituents on the proposed changes to the pension plan. People in their mid-career are being hit hard by the changes. I refer especially to those who are within the age range of 30 to 45 years. They are under the impression that they are going to receive less from their pension than they had anticipated. My question is for the minister of Treasury Board and Finance. How many people are impacted by these changes, and what is the rationale behind making these changes?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. No doubt there are thousands of members of the public sector that are impacted by these changes, but the case for the change is solid. People are collecting pensions longer. The ratio of people paying into the plan is almost equal to the number of people that are collecting, and in some plans it's actually the other way. That's simply not sustainable. Changes are needed to ensure that these pensions are there for those 30- and 40-year-olds who will retire when they hit their 60s.

Mr. Speaker, as trustee of these plans and as the Minister of Finance we have a fiduciary duty and a responsibility to protect that pension promise of a guaranteed percentage of their annual income for the rest of their lives.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Minister. During recent meetings my constituents are telling me that according to their actuaries these plans are viable and do not require the changes proposed. Mr. Minister, what is the problem?

The Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you go to an actuary, you give him your assumptions. You say: here are the assumptions that I want you to use when you do the analysis of this plan. Unfortunately, some of the actuarial analysis that I've seen would say that the assumption is that the number of contributors is going to grow by 2 per cent a year. For many of these plans that's not the case. In fact, in the PSP plan there are the same number of contributors in 2013 as there were in 1993, but the number of retirees has almost doubled.

The second thing they use is the mortality tables. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, some of the reports that I've seen use old mortality tables. In other words, people are living longer, and they . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: my constituents are also expressing concern that the imposition of a contribution cap will reduce their defined benefits in the future. Is that true?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are going to be moving to a joint sponsorship, which means that the employers and the employees, the people who pay, will be making the decisions as to how those benefits and changes will be made in the future.

I can tell you that the contribution rate cap was put in place to address concerns that were expressed by the plan members and the employers about the ever-increasing contribution rates, because the only place they could go was to take more money out of the pockets of the employees. Some of these plans cost more than 25 per cent of the salaries. Those are some of the highest rates in Canada. We want our employees to have a competitive salary. We want them to be able to take home pay so that they can do the things they want to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Edmonton-South West.

2:40 Queen Elizabeth II Highway Overpass at Balzac

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents and visitors in my constituency are raising serious concerns about the state of the highway 566 and QE II interchange in Balzac. Development in that area has skyrocketed, and most people use this interchange to access the CrossIron Mills megamall. Alberta Transportation recognized the need to widen that overpass and placed it on a three-year capital plan in 2011, but then they took it off. To the Transportation minister: I know that priorities change – we understand that – but, Minister, the traffic concerns here are getting worse, not better. Why did you take it off the list?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, if people have specific questions about specific intersections or boat launches or kilometres of road, it would do better to send me the information ahead of time, and I'll work with the constituents to find it. Politicizing the thing in the House isn't the way to get something done.

Mr. Speaker, we have a list of road projects, we set priorities, and if this one was bumped off the list, obviously it doesn't meet the priorities stacked up against the rest of the requests in the province.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, again, the former minister was made aware of the file. He ought to be aware of it, too.

Given that there have been two engineering studies done on this overpass, one stating that with the development in Balzac and area the overpass won't handle existing traffic, much less traffic increases, and given that that was back in 2009 and traffic has increased 24 per cent on the 566 since, again to the minister: why aren't you listening to the engineers? Can't you see this is a huge safety issue?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, without knowing all of the details, it's hard to comment, but I don't think the citizens of Alberta should pay for a developer to improve access to his establishment that he's going to make money on. The municipality approves development permits and asks the developer to pay for the improvements needed to access his site.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about two provincial highways here.

Traffic often backs up, in fact, on the QE II, on the overpass, all the way to the highway. Now, given that traffic is coming to a screeching halt on a major highway and given that even the RCMP are raising concerns about this, will you commit to putting

this project back on the priority list, where it belongs, in the interest of public safety before it's too late?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's up to the municipality. If a development has increased the amount of traffic in the area, it's up to the developer to improve the highway even if it is a provincial highway. That's a cost of doing business. The rest of the taxpayers of Alberta shouldn't upfront the cost of that business to make a profit.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That concludes Oral Question Period for today.

Could we have unanimous consent to please revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you some tremendous community advocates from Edmonton-Glenora whom I've known for many years. I want to thank them for all of their volunteer efforts. We solve many problems together at the Glenora Community League. I'd like to acknowledge Ken and Connie Marshall and thank them for coming to the House.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, in 30 seconds we will finish off private members' statements. I believe Lacombe-Ponoka is up. Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Russian Intervention in Ukraine

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in opposition to the Soviet-style Russian neoimperialism of Vladimir Putin and his annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region. I am proud that the Ukrainian flag now flies at the Alberta Legislature so that we can all show our solidarity with the freedom-loving Ukrainians. It is unfortunate that our government decided to inject partisan politics into such a serious affair by withholding invitations for opposition parties at the flag-raising ceremony, but I digress.

Events are unfolding quickly in eastern Europe. There are reports of a Ukrainian base being stormed by Russian troops while in Moldova Russian-backed politicians are moving ahead with a request to be incorporated into the Russian Federation. The Republic of Georgia still has two regions under Russian occupation as well, Mr. Speaker.

Russia cannot be allowed to bully liberal democracies any longer, and we stand united with our federal counterparts in condemning and sanctioning all those involved in this injustice. Only a handful of so-called countries have moved to recognize this sham of a Russian takeover of Ukraine, and they include the largest bastions of horror in our world: Syria, North Korea, and Venezuela. These are Vladimir Putin's friends. Now we learn that Russia is sanctioning eastern European countries like Lithuania for condemning this takeover of sovereign land.

But there is hope, and there is support for our beleaguered friends in Ukraine. After all, Alberta has one of the largest Ukrainian populations in the world. Ukrainians helped build Alberta into the home that we all love today. Last week on behalf of the Wildrose Official Opposition I attended a rally by the Canadian Ukrainian Congress, that raised over \$100,000 for fallen heroes of the Euromaidan. They are already remembered as those who fell for democracy and died to rid Ukraine of tyranny.

So I say once again: Slava Ukraini.

[Translation] Glory to Ukraine. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Thank you. And the response would be Heroyam slava.

[Translation] Glory to the heroes. [As submitted]

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of.

Bill 6

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

The existing legislation protects Albertans buying a new home. Sometimes when new legislation is introduced, there are minor modifications needed, and that's what these amendments to the New Home Buyer Protection Act are about. The proposed amendments are the result of extensive stakeholder consultation while preparing the regulations in 2013. I look forward to speaking more about this legislation.

I'm proud to table Bill 6, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act. I move that the bill be read a first time.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We have several. Let's be as brief as we can, please.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first tabling I'm doing on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to the Premier by Dale and Judy Swaré, two constituents of Edmonton-Calder. Judy has been waiting for back surgery for almost a year. In this four-page letter she outlines the tragic deterioration of our health care system under this PC government as she has experienced it firsthand. She says, "In one of the richest economies in the world, where universal health care is constitutionally enshrined, explain the shocking failure of your government to deliver the most basic of these services and tell us what you intend to do about it."

My second tabling. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office received, asking this PC government to restore consistent, reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. These postcards were collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A and are clear evidence the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both accessible and affordable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition, three tablings. The first is the appropriate number of copies of the letter that he wrote to the Premier recommending a special auditor.

The second is the appropriate number of copies of the contract worth \$240,000, which is a result of our FOIP. This is the contract between the government and Navigator for special communications advice during the floods.

The last is, in fact, Navigator's web printoff of what they were paid as a result of various contracts with the government of Alberta.

May I continue with my tablings, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I have three tablings, and they're all about the government's push to change the pension. The first is from Jason Woo, who is a younger engineer with the city of Edmonton. He points out that this scheme would add 10 years to his career and points out the number of well-educated professionals working for civic governments, that this really challenges their loyalty or the reason for them to stay working for the public sector.

2:50

The second is an e-mail from a constituent who feels that as a taxpayer we have made an agreement with the public employees and that on his behalf we the public do not approve of the proposed measures. He points out that the majority of the people who will suffer the effects of this change in pensions are women.

Finally, a letter from Rhonda van Heyst, who started working in '78 as a nurse. She worked on a part-time basis to raise her children and be an active volunteer, and the factor changes are going to very much affect her. Nursing is a hard job. It's going to be really hard on her to keep going for that period of time.

None of them are too happy with what the government's doing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the required number of copies. I'm tabling these reports from the 2006 flood. I guess the comments of the Transportation minister were that they weren't official sites. I have photos here of repairs to McKinnon flats; Portage boat launch; Jensen's access, which is Legacy Island; more McKinnon flats; and highway 24 access, the one I mentioned in my question. These pictures were all taken by Alberta fish and wildlife, and there were inspections completed after the work was done to these sites. I'd just like to table those.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies that I would like to table of an e-mail that I received from Dr. Ian Armstrong. He references that the Canadian Psychological Association recently released an independent report by a group of internationally recognized health economists. The report, *An Imperative for Change*, states that "the delivery of mental health services . . . can be characterized as a silent crisis" and provides a business case and proposes models for improved access to psychological services that can be implemented in our province. He writes: "I urge you to affirm your commitment to our

province's health and specifically to increasing access to psychologists by considering the following recommendations from the report." And they're in this e-mail.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that takes us to points of order. We had one point of order raised at 2:22 p.m. or thereabouts by Airdrie during a question and answer going on between I think it was Red Deer-North and the Justice minister.

Hon. opposition whip, are you looking after this?

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a while since I've done these. I rise according to 23(h), (i), and (j). During the debate the Justice minister had indicated – and it was quite inappropriate – that members of this Official Opposition, and I quote, mocked victims of crime. What an absurd statement. You know, drunk driving is so prevalent in our province, in the country. To say that somehow we mocked victims of crime clearly crosses the line.

Of course, the Wildrose has had positions in the past in regard to the .05 legislation. We've advocated that there's a limited amount of resources for enforcement and that that's why the police should be targeting those driving over the criminal legal limit. Otherwise, they're spending a lot of time on the .05s. Of course, we've advocated for five provincial checkstop teams to catch those drunk drivers throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has done absolutely nothing on individuals who've been charged and convicted of drunk driving in regard to their driver's licence. He's done absolutely nothing on that, yet he's going to try and indicate in this Legislature that somehow this side is mocking victims of crime. You know, by blaming the federal Conservatives, he's taking on the role of the Trudeau Liberals. He should be doing his job instead and increasing the penalties for those who are charged and convicted of drinking and driving.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully submit that he crossed the line by saying that individuals on this side mock victims of crime, and I request that those statements be retracted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the point of order. I wish that the hon. member would stick to the actual violation that they allege. Clearly, whether or not the minister, in that member's opinion, somehow emulates a federal Liberal politician has nothing to do with the point of order at hand.

Nonetheless, the minister was referring to the coaster campaign, a campaign by which the opposition stood in opposition to our drunk-driving legislation, Mr. Speaker. The campaign did not mock victims. The minister incorrectly chose those words, and through me unreservedly withdraws those words.

The Speaker: Thank you. I think that closes the matter because the statement has been withdrawn. It's in *Hansard*, and it's been clarified by both sides, so let us move on with the next item here.

Before we do, can I just remind you that the legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and this evening for consideration of main estimates, or the budget. This afternoon, for example, starting at 3:30 p.m., the legislative policy committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Environment and Sustainable Resource Development in committee room A, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for

Agriculture and Rural Development in committee room B at the same time.

This evening, starting at 7 p.m., the legislative policy committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates of Service Alberta in committee room A.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:57 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 19, 2014

Issue 11

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 19, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Almighty God and Holy Creator, help us to prioritize our duties that they might yield the maximum possible for our constituents. Help us be the voice for those who have none and depend upon us to speak for them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is quite the privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend of freedom and democracy and an ardent defender of free speech, the MP for Westlock-St. Paul, Mr. Brian Storseth. Despite his young age Brian has been a Member of Parliament since 2006 and currently serves on the important Environment and Sustainable Development Committee. He is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. Edmonton-Centre, followed by Airdrie and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I am so excited. I just want to ask you if you could keep a secret and if the rest of my colleagues could keep a secret. This is my favourite school here today. With us today in the members' gallery we have 44 students from John A. McDougall school in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and with them today are Ms Veronica Chong, Mr. Jesse Lalonde, and Ms Jill White, their teachers and aides. These students are inquisitive. They are so with it. They are hard working. They are diverse. Please help me welcome my favourite school.

The Speaker: As we wait for other guests to arrive, let us move to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you some wonderful students from the Spruce View school in my riding along with their teachers and group leaders and parent helpers. The students came here today to understand the process of what we do here in the Legislature. I'd like the students to rise along with their teachers Mr. Joseph Amundrud; Brittany Seifried, who's a student teacher with us today; Ryan Johannson; and parent helpers Jennifer Harty, Linda Passakka, and Jolinda Savage. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other students or student groups?

If not, let us move on to other guests, starting with the Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members today Ms Vickie Kaminski, who will commence her role as the new chief executive officer of Alberta Health Services on June 2 of this year. Ms Kaminski is well known in the world of health services, both for her time as a front-line worker as a registered nurse all the way through to her role as a senior leader in various health care systems. Throughout her 35-year career she has focused on quality of patient care and implementing best practice. I'm very confident that she shares the views of this government, that support for front-line staff in our health care system is her number one job. I'd ask my fellow members to join me in welcoming Ms Vickie Kaminski and ask her to rise and receive our warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Irene Gaudet, Brent Gibson, and Bev Hill. My guests are all members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees Legislative Committee. The Legislative Committee advises AUPE members on questions relating to the union's constitution. They are visiting the Legislature as guests of all three opposition parties to observe and learn more about parliamentary procedure. I would now ask Irene, Brent, and Bev to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two hard-working, passionate, and dedicated northern Albertans from Fort McMurray who are here today to demand action from their MLAs and from their government on a long-term care facility for their community. They have gathered a total of 6,100 names – and they'd like to mention that they are all of voting age – to advocate for a long-term care centre in the downtown. I'd ask that Joan Furber and Myrtle Dussault rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you two wonderful guests visiting us from Whitehorse, Yukon, Jean Kellogg and Don Black. They are here to observe the question period. They are parents of my EA, Erin Black. At this time I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of AUPE's Legislative Committee. They are Gil Laflamme, John Barnes, and Karl Clauss. The Legislative Committee advises AUPE members on questions relating to the union's constitution, and they are visiting the Legislature today to

observe and learn more about parliamentary procedure. I'd like to thank all the AUPE members and let them know that the Alberta Liberals want to repeal Bill 45 and Bill 46 and stand up for pensioners, for AUPE, and the rest of the civil service. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly my guests Valerie McAdoo and Mélanie Edison. Both Valerie and Mélanie are here today because they are very strong supporters of funding for public health care, in particular funding for in vitro fertilization, a procedure that could be publicly funded and save millions of dollars, resulting in fewer birth complications, fewer premature babies, and fewer neo intensive stays. I would ask Valerie and Mélanie to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and introduce through you and to you to all members of this Assembly 37 outstanding students from my old school, George McDougall high school. They are accompanied today by their teacher Mrs. Tammy Hodgson as well as parent helpers Mrs. Thaidra Walsh and Mr. Tim Fernandes. I'd ask them now to please rise and receive the warmest welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three municipal officials from southern Alberta who are strong representatives for their community. I'd ask that they rise as I mention their names. First, I have Cameron Gardner, the reeve of the MD of Ranchland; Henry Van Hierden, councillor, MD of Willow Creek; and last but not least, Suzanne Oel, councillor for the MD of Foothills. These individuals have expressed to me the importance of our Alberta first responder radio communications system and that we are fully funding this program, and it will start going online this year. I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members three of my constituents here today from southern Alberta and Cardston-Taber-Warner. Steve Evanson is a neighbour of mine in Stirling, and Mitch Holst and Brian Gibson are from Taber. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to stand and introduce you to Mr. David Kettles, who is a director with the department. Also, it's my pleasure to introduce my good friend Michael Reeves, who is the CEO of Ports-to-Plains Alliance, which Alberta is a key component in, a group of 10 states from the United States and Alberta who work together to drive forward

initiatives in that zone and that region. If they could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you eight people from my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat and Forty Mile county. First, I have Steve Wikkerink and his wife, Sonja. I have Gerald and Kathy Reimer, Chantel Timmons and her husband, Everett, and their two wonderful children, hockey player and 10-year-old Dacey and seven-year-old Keely. These people, of course, are rural Albertans who work very, very hard for rural Alberta. They were all instrumental in putting on the 100-year anniversary at Burdett last year, which the hon. Finance minister came down to enjoy. I would ask all eight to please rise and share in the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Bobby-Joe Rovensky and Hal Welke. Bobby-Joe and Hal are members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and sit on the Legislative Committee. Their main role is to advise AUPE members on issues relating to the union's constitution. Appropriately enough, as mentioned by the leader of the Liberal opposition, they are visiting the Legislature to observe and learn more about parliamentary procedure. Bobby-Joe and Hal are seated in the public gallery, and I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other introductions? Yes. We have the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Medicine Hat, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 18 members of the insurance brokers association of Alberta. We had a great conversation this morning regarding the flooding that happened last year in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and the impact on insurance for my constituents. I know that they also met with other members here today. They are seated in the visitors' gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I say their names: Gord Enders, Steve Hambly, Patti Hunt, Scott Treasure, Julia Marshall, Scott Romans, Robyn Young, Gerry Baert, Mitch Holst, Jody Lohr, Gord Cowan, Catherine Cake, George Hodgson, Caleb Maksymchuk, Steve Evanson, Christina Rankin, Lorrie King, and Rikki McBride. I ask that everybody please give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Okay. We're actually going to go to Medicine Hat next, followed by the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very special individual. Mr. Gord Cowan was my campaign manager in the 2012 provincial election, and he was previously introduced. I am very happy to say that I am here because of Gord's hard work, but if you're unhappy I'm here, talk to Gord. Gord, I'd ask you to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the county of Grande Prairie, who I see just joined us. They've been here for the AAMD and C convention for the last few days, and I know they have meetings in the building this afternoon. I would ask them to stand: Reeve Leanne Beaupre; CAO Bill Rogan; Daryl Beeston, councillor; and Herb Pfau, superintendent, public works. I think that's all that's with you. Please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Long-term Care in Fort McMurray

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort McMurray is one of Canada's fastest growing cities. It is the economic driver of our province and home to one of the most robust workforces in the world. It literally gushes cash into the provincial coffers. However, the very individuals who helped build Fort McMurray continue to be neglected and ignored by this PC government. During the 2008 election then Premier Ed Stelmach made a promise: his government would build a much-needed long-term care centre downtown to care for its seniors.

It is now 2014, still no shovel in the ground. Seniors in need of long-term care are either forced from the community all the way to Edmonton or, for those that remain in Fort McMurray, they live on the third and the fourth floors of a hospital in acute-care beds that were never intended to be long-term care spaces.

Seniors and their families want the facility to be built downtown, in the heart of the very community that they built. The PCs, however, made a political decision, and they approved the facility to be built in a remote location, far removed from amenities, separating couples and separating families. In the 2012 election both Fort McMurray MLAs were clear – very clear – that if elected, they would fight to have the long-term care facility built downtown, not in Parsons Creek but downtown. However, since the election they can only seem to either stay silent or blame the federal government for provincial responsibilities.

It's time to stop blaming the federal government, it's time for this government to keep their promise to the community of Fort McMurray, and it's time for these elected MLAs to stand up for their community and their constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A recent report shows that the PC legacy of chaos in our health care system is carrying over into mental health. We're paying \$750 million a year with no systemic planning for these services. The GAP-MAP, authored by Dr. Cam Wild, makes several key conclusions, including that existing services do not provide sufficient care to meet the needs of Alberta adults, that the system is reactive and focused on acute care, and that there is no standardized way of referring to mental health services between Alberta Health Services zones, the government, and contracted agencies. The GAP-MAP illustrates how this government's failure to provide adequate, affordable

public counselling services has forced Albertans into neglecting mental health care, something that costs us more in acute services in the long run.

When the Alberta New Democrats released our recommendations on how to properly invest the \$1 billion increase in health transfer payments from the federal government, we called for an additional \$100 million for treatment for mental health and addictions in this province. We believe that by strategically organizing our mental health and addictions treatments and funding qualified counsellors within the public system, we can start to ensure that Albertans have access to long-term care and treatment options for mental health that will improve the quality of life for all.

This PC government has shortchanged Alberta's health care system by \$400 million in the 2014 budget and failed to invest in fixing the patchwork of services that currently make up our mental health services. Albertans who rely on these services deserve better, Mr. Speaker, than the mess that this PC government has created.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2013 Alberta's population exceeded the 4 million mark. This is not surprising given that people from all over the country – in fact, all over the world – are moving here because of our strong economy. Our province's economic growth has surpassed the rest of the country's for the last two years, and people look to our province as a model for fiscal and social responsibility.

In 10 years Alberta's population is expected to exceed 5 million people, and in order to prepare for this influx, our government has implemented a strong and realistic fiscal plan to ensure the province's continued success. This plan supports our vision for the infrastructure needs of our province today and tomorrow. Apart from delivering a \$2.6 billion operational surplus this year, our capital plan over the next three years invests more than \$19 billion for much-needed infrastructure projects. Day to day I hear from my constituents that they want schools, hospitals, and safe, well-maintained roads and highways. That is why our government has a capital plan that includes 155 school projects, seven postsecondary projects, 24 health facility projects, 258 kilometres of new and twinned roads, and the rehabilitation of 2,500 kilometres of our highways.

Mr. Speaker, our government has a rational and optimistic plan for the infrastructure needs of the province. We can't and we won't delay these projects. When our population reaches 5 million in 10 years, we will all be thankful that we invested in the future of Alberta today.

Thank you.

1:50

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: Just before we start the clock, hon. members, we have a unique situation today. The independent Member for Calgary-Varsity will be taking the sixth spot today instead of tomorrow. Tomorrow, should the Member for Calgary-Foothills be here, he would take that spot. That is an arrangement that I have approved due to extenuating circumstances. Since independent members are only allowed one question per week, that's the

only way we could make our complicated and mathematical formula work, so I hope you will abide me in that regard.

You all know the 35-second rule for a question and the 35-second rule for an answer. I will give you five seconds of warning so that nobody feels offended that I cut them off. You all know the no preamble rule after the fifth spot. And could we please cease with the interjections? Yesterday 22 interjections were noted. I chose not to rise on any of them, but eight of them were given by one hon. member. Please, let's listen to each other's questions, let's listen to each other's answers, and we shall go from there.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Administration Costs

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the culture of entitlement in the PC cabinet is clear, but it extends far beyond that. We've learned that the number of Alberta Health Services managers and bureaucrats earning more than \$100,000 a year has gone up 50 per cent in the last four years. Between 2009 and 2013 AHS hired or promoted an additional 1,231 non front-line staff with salaries over \$100,000. That's nearly one bureaucrat every single day. To the Health minister: wouldn't these dollars be better spent on the front lines?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea where the hon. member may be getting her information from, and that's not the first time I would have had this question. What I can tell you is that Alberta Health Services, through an organizational review that was done last summer, has reduced the number of vice-presidents from 80 to 10, has flattened the organization by three management levels, and has rededicated the role of all managers in that organization to supporting front-line staff.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we got it through a freedom of information request.

Albertans are tired of watching the bloated health care bureaucracy get bigger while wait times for procedures and treatments get longer. Albertans continue to pay more and more to fund their health care system, and they continue to get worse and worse results. This is a prime example of why: more money for managers, less money for patients. To the Health minister: when is he going to get AHS under control?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member shows once again how little she understands the complexity of health care organizations and the fact that she has absolutely no appreciation that this is a 100,000-person organization, the fifth-largest employer in Canada, and the best health care system in Canada. Again, we never have the benefit of the information that she's using. But we know that many, many of these positions are directly involved in the support of front-line staff in managing patient care, large complex hospitals, and community programs.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what I do know about how much these health care managers are costing Alberta taxpayers: more than \$120 million a year. Here's what that money could actually do. Patients would be able to get 5,000 insulin pumps or 1,000 hip and knee replacements or 200 long-term care beds and 170 full-time nurses. It's a matter of priorities: a larger payroll for bureaucrats or shorter wait times for patients. To the Health minister: which does he think Albertans would rather have?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans would like to have is members of this House who are not members of the government caucus stand up in support and defence and speak with pride about the work that they do each and every day to deliver health care to Albertans. This hon. member has in one fell swoop just demonized and invalidated the work of everyone in that organization that earns over \$100,000. This is the height of irresponsibility, it reflects a lack of understanding that knows no bounds in any Legislative Assembly that I know of in this province, and it's blatantly false and irresponsible.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: We stand up for front-line workers every single day.

Probation Services for Aboriginal Youth

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government is taking in record revenues and taking on record amounts of debt, yet they still make the most callous budget cuts in places that hurt Albertans. Jodene McIsaac has worked for more than 20 years counselling high-risk native youth as a probation officer. Her work undoubtedly saves the justice system many times her salary, but her employer just found out that this uncaring government won't renew her contract. To the Justice minister: how does he justify this decision?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to advise this hon. member that there actually are no cuts in this particular area. I have every confidence in the individuals that work within our ministry that they will be able to provide the services needed to these individuals in a culturally sensitive manner.

Ms Smith: Native Albertans are massively overrepresented in the justice system. The program that Jodene McIsaac has worked on for over two decades is the only one that specifically targets native youth at risk. The Justice ministry says that Jodene's specialized clientele can be absorbed by other probation officers, who already have a huge number of clients. These young people could be helped, but they're falling through the cracks. Can the minister find \$80,000 of waste somewhere else in his government to be able to restore this program?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the preamble to that member's question is unfortunately incorrect because my ministry also has its own youth probation officer in Edmonton who has a specialized aboriginal caseload, again, designed to provide the services that these at-risk people need but also in a financially appropriate manner with a view to taxpayers' interests as well.

Ms Smith: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker: \$80,000 is a rounding error on the sum total of all the bad decisions this cabinet and this government make in a single week. This government employs communications people more than any other government of its size. Our ministries have deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers and chiefs of staff to chief assistant deputy ministers and executive advisers to assistant deputy ministers. How is it that this government can employ all of those advisers, but it can't find \$80,000 to support a program that actually makes a difference and saves money?

Mr. Denis: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I as the minister responsible for this department have absolutely every confidence in the ministry's employees that they will be able to provide these types

of services to the at-risk youth. These people are well trained, these people work hard, and these people are culturally sensitive to these particular aboriginal youths. I think that this member would appreciate that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: More misplaced priorities, Mr. Speaker.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Ms Smith: I've been criticizing the flood maps for quite some time. Let me tell you about Doug Kingsford of Calgary-Elbow. He's complained to his MLA and has gotten nowhere. His home had 13 feet of water in it: no buyout. His neighbour four houses away had 18 inches of water in his basement, and he was bought out. This example shows that the flood maps are clearly wrong, and the government has to know it. Will the minister stop making arbitrary decisions on buyouts based on maps that everyone knows are wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we work with the tools that we have in front of us. Clearly, we've learned a great deal from the floods of this past year. There's a lot of work going on to try and understand the learnings from these tremendous floods that we experienced throughout southern Alberta. But the flood maps are the flood maps that we're working with, which is the knowledge we had prior to the floods last spring. Those are the facts. That's how the program was designed in order to give Albertans a choice about how to move forward with their lives.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they should have redrawn the flood maps before they started the flood payout program, like we said.

Mr. Kingsford has also experienced the capriciousness of LandLink. Everything in his basement and main floor was destroyed. Most of those items are on the list of the things that DRP is supposed to pay out. LandLink visited his home, yet the money he has been sent doesn't match up with the money he was supposed to get. When he asks questions, he gets no answers. Is this how the minister thinks LandLink should be handling these files?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of work going on for a lot of people on behalf of a lot of people. As the hon. member has enquired earlier, we made a clear indication that we've created a transition agreement with LandLink in order to transition them out of this role over the next year. But the important thing is that we are working with every single Albertan who has filed a claim. We're making sure that they are eligible, to respect them, to ensure that they are looked after, and protecting the taxpayer.

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, claimants want LandLink fired. Mr. Kingsford hasn't been given enough to fix his home. He is like so many other homeowners in High River, Exshaw, Canmore, Bragg Creek, Elbow Park, and elsewhere whose lives were turned upside down by the flood. The government has let them down. LandLink has victimized them. We hear talk of a \$6 billion flood, but that money has not gone to the folks who have lost everything. Doesn't this government care that they have let so many Albertans down?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, that would be just a misstatement of the facts. In fact, the government of Alberta has

provided nearly 5,000 DRP payments as of last week, 4,700 by the end of last week. I know they're going out the door quickly as we speak: over \$48 million to individuals; in addition, millions and millions more to communities, to municipalities to ensure that we protect Albertans for the future as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Flood Recovery Communications Contract

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The closer I look at the lucrative, sole-sourced, untendered Navigator contract, the more concerned I get. Does the government completely lack judgment, or does it intentionally reward members of the PC family? Maybe it's both. A one-quarter-million-dollar contract for crisis communications allegedly began on July 18, 2013, but it wasn't even signed until October 28, just three days before it expired. To the Premier: the only crisis that existed when the contract was signed was your upcoming leadership race. Why did you waste a quarter of a million dollars of taxpayers' money?

Mr. Hughes: I believe the hon. member is referring to some contracts that were provided under a sole-sourced mechanism in the crisis of the flood of last summer. That includes Tervita, includes Navigator, includes Norex, and includes Stantec. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that when the minister responsible for this program, for responding on behalf of Albertans, reached out, he reached out for talented, class A organizations that could step up and support the province of Alberta to meet the needs of Albertans in a crisis, and they served them well.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the contracts represented by the Minister of Municipal Affairs were given by Executive Council. Navigator and its contract staff list is a who's who of Tory land. It's headed by a person the Premier calls a friend, managed by a guy who ran the last two PC election campaigns, includes an adviser to the current Premier and predecessor, and then there are the Minister of Health's former chief of staff and the then-minister of Municipal Affairs' PC leadership campaign adviser. To the Premier or the minister: is the real reason you didn't tender out this quarter-million-dollar contract because you wanted to keep it in the PC family?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, the work by Navigator related to the floods included strategic communications advice, research on flood recovery, a communications strategy. Albertans were asking – in fact, the associate ministers were on the ground, and they clearly identified a strong need for clear communications to people who were in need, in crisis, responding to the flood. We responded with people we knew could deliver on behalf of Albertans, and they did that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, they delivered all right: a quarter of a million dollars of taxpayers' money to their buddies.

At first glance I thought Navigator's quarter-million-dollar contract was for three months' worth of work, and I thought that was pretty rich. But if you go by when it was actually signed to when it was allegedly completed, it works out to a quarter of a million dollars for three days of work. That's \$83,333.33 per day. One of the contractual obligations was to file weekly activity reports. To the Minister: will you please table those reports today, or do you need some time to back out of those as well?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, this work was done in the middle of a very difficult circumstance in support of the Public Affairs Bureau. They provided advice to the Public Affairs Bureau. As we all recall, many, many very talented people within the government of Alberta were fully deployed throughout the flood-affected areas. They were out there working with Albertans, helping them to recover, and this enabled them to help ensure that Albertans were also well informed as a result.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Government Effectiveness

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to know how the PC Party work plan will affect them and how it will affect the functioning of this government, yet the Premier has avoided the question. She's avoided it all week long. Since she's now taking direction from the PC executive, will she please tell Albertans what is in the work plan and how it will affect the work of the government?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and this government take our work very seriously on behalf of Albertans. We've said that we have a building Alberta plan, which invests in families and communities, ensures that government lives within its means, and opens new markets for Albertans. That's important work that we do every day. Our party supports that work. Our party worked very hard to get us elected so that we could do that work based on the values of Albertans. That's what Albertans responded to in the campaign, and that's what they're responding to now, good government from people who understand that this is all about the future of this province. We care about that future.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier really cared about her responsibilities, she'd show up for work.

This Premier was elected on a promise to end child poverty in five years, yet three of five budgets have gone by, and there has been no mention of that commitment. In fact, there are significant cuts to the poverty reduction programs in this budget. To the Premier: does your work plan include keeping your promise to end child poverty in Alberta?

Mr. Campbell: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this government and this Premier work every day to improve the quality of life for every Albertan, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable Albertans to make sure that they get a good start, to make sure that there's an education system in place. Education in the long term is what will defeat the poverty cycle. The other supports that families need to be strong are also a very significant part of this government's job. This Premier showed up this morning to the AAMD and C and had two standing ovations from the AAMD and C because they appreciate the work that this Premier does and that this government does.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader has made a point of order. I realize that I was not supposed to draw attention to the repeated absence of the Premier, so I will apologize.

This Premier promised full-day kindergarten in the last election. So far, Mr. Speaker, it's another broken promise. Alberta children deserve the best possible start on their education. I want to ask the Premier or whoever is speaking on her behalf: does your PC work

plan involve keeping your promise to Alberta families for full-day kindergarten? Yes or no?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, while this hon. member plays the clown, our Premier goes out on behalf of Albertans every day: opening new markets, investing in families and communities, and making sure that we live within our means while we do it. The particular focus that this Premier has on vulnerable Albertans is not lost on Albertans. In fact, they've stepped up each and every day to work with this government. Not-for-profit organizations, volunteers, and others in our community have worked very hard for vulnerable Albertans to make sure that our kids get a good start. Our Minister of Education is doing that every day, this government is doing that every day, and our Premier is doing that every day.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that was really an uncalled-for statement. You might want to review it and make a comment about it later. I may invite you to do that.

Let's move on. Calgary-Varsity.

Alberta Future Fund

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Calgary-Varsity want assurance that this government is spending our money in a disciplined way. Many are encouraged by the fiscal discipline and logic reflected in the Minister of Finance's approach to the budget, but many were also startled by the government's Bill 1 and, in particular, the creation of a \$2 billion Alberta future fund for such a vague purpose. To the Minister of Finance: why did you need a special fund earmarked for such a purpose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 1 was debated here in the House. It was passed here in this Legislative Assembly. As part of Bill 1 the Alberta future fund is really reflecting the vision that previous Premiers have had, like Premier Lougheed when he talked about the heritage savings trust fund being something that would be used for transformational items in the province in the future, for Albertans of today and tomorrow. The idea is that any decision to spend funds from that fund has to be made here in this Legislature by way of a resolution. It has the added benefit of having that debate.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given the promise to consult with Albertans on how our heritage fund monies will be spent, how were Albertans consulted about this idea of creating a special \$2 billion Alberta future fund?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, it is a good question, and I'm glad the hon. member asked it. We had 12 open houses around the province this past year. We had numerous presentations . . .

An Hon. Member: Fortune-telling.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, hon. member.

We had numerous presentations made to us about how we should get the savings that we have to work for us, not just sit in an account to never be spent. The idea of Premier Lougheed – and I mentioned it in this House – when he set up the Alberta heritage

savings trust fund, was that 20 per cent of the fund would actually be spent on assets and future endeavours.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Finally, again to the Finance minister: do you plan to come back to Albertans to talk about the specifics of how this \$2 billion will be spent?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed I plan to come back to this House. If future members want to bring forward a resolution to release funds from this fund, that's exactly where it comes, into this Legislature. I welcome Albertans to provide us with ideas as to what they see as transformative ideas for the future, for the purposes of this fund. I welcome ideas coming from our municipalities. In fact, even the municipality the hon. member is from, I'm sure, has some ideas as to how they could help transform Alberta today and in the future. We were asked today, Mr. Speaker, about the long-term vision of our province at AAMD and C. This is part of that, setting a stage.

Long-term Care in Fort McMurray

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, this PC government has allowed the long-term care situation in Fort McMurray to deteriorate to a crisis stage. After promising to build the facility there in 2008, they are no closer to having one up and running than the day Premier Ed Stelmach first made that promise. This project has been bogged down by indecision, mismanagement, and petty politics. Health minister, when will your government stop the political rhetoric, keep your government's promise, and get this facility built downtown, where it's most wanted and needed?

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, I was recently in Fort McMurray, met with the local councillors and seniors groups about seniors' accommodations now and in the future. Even the community's current needs cannot be met with the downtown Willow Square site alone. This government is ready to move ahead now with the residents at Parsons Creek, but we've been unable to secure the necessary permits from the municipality to build there. The Minister of Infrastructure has been working with the federal government to secure the Willow Square land for some kind of a potential partnership, so the work goes on. We are very much aware of the needs, and we're ready to act now.

Mrs. Towle: Well, clearly, this member was not at the same meeting because even the mayor has come out and said that she'll actually give the land.

Given that this government talks about supporting local autonomy and given that the MD and the council of Fort McMurray and surrounding areas have unanimously passed a resolution to have the building put in the downtown location, why is this government continuing to ignore the autonomy of council, the community, and, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, everyday families?

Mr. McIver: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like the Legislature to welcome the hon. member to the building Alberta plan. Thereafter, I would like to point out that the fact is that the government of Alberta already owns 25 per cent of that land; the federal government owns 75 per cent. So the municipality or the mayor has no ability to do that. In fact, I've been in contact with the federal government in support with the MLAs from Fort McMurray. I think we could have this land in our hand any day now because we've had what I would characterize as fairly productive conversations, and we'll go ahead, building Alberta.

Mrs. Towle: It's always so sad when the minister stands up and doesn't even understand the issue.

Given that Fort McMurray's two MLAs were elected on a firm commitment to fight tooth and nail to have the facility built downtown and not at Parsons Creek and given that since the election they've been utterly silent other than to blame the federal government for this debacle, to the Associate Minister for Accountability, Transparency, and Transformation: how transparent is it to abandon your key campaign promises in favour of saving your own political skin within your PC Party?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise and answer this question. This government is building Alberta, and part of that plan is to build a long-term care facility in Fort McMurray. [interjection] We have a wider vision. We support the municipal vision for a site downtown, and we also have a vision to have a long-term care centre in Parsons Creek. This government is going to deliver long-term care in Fort McMurray. [interjections]

The Speaker: Let me stop the clock for a moment, Mr. Clerk, please.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have so far counted 15 inappropriate interjections. I have your names, and I have your titles all listed down here. I would like for there to be no more.

Unfortunately, the people listening to this on the radio or watching it on television don't hear all the interjections here that our visitors hear. But when it gets to the point that I can't hear the question or the answer, then something is really wrong because those questions and those answers go through me. Even right now some of you are heckling, Airdrie for example. It's not necessary. I have ministers over here who are taking the bait from someone over there and vice versa. I would just like us to please have this be the only interjection I have to make today.

Let's start the clock and go on.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of attention given lately to the Minister of Education's efforts to redesign the provincial curriculum. Opponents are misleading parents and causing worry and uncertainty. Last night the opposition cold-called some of these parents to further spread misinformation. However, some Albertans who identified themselves as Wildrose supporters refuted the opposition's claim and confirmed that basic facts and skills are being taught. My question is to the Minister of Education. Who can we believe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. Talk about backfiring, Mr. Speaker. Last night the opposition held a tele town hall and tried to further propagate their spin, and they were called out. Several of the parents and teachers that were out there spoke up against the opposition's rhetoric at their own tele town hall, like Wildrose supporter Laurie, who works in a school and said, quote, kids are taught basic math skills; or Carol, a math tutor, who said, and I quote, the basics are included; or Keith, who is a dad, who's impressed with the curriculum and said, quote, I was blown away with that type of learning. The opposition needs to stop disparaging our teachers and educators and students.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister confirm that with the curriculum redesign Alberta students will continue to learn fundamental skills?

Mr. J. Johnson: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. They already are, and they are expected to, and we'll even strengthen that through curriculum redesign. Our curriculum redesign will be cutting edge. It'll be comprehensive, dynamic, and rigorous. But there's no rush on this. We'll work to get it right, and we'll work with Albertans, but we reject the insulting allegations of the opposition. We need to empower our teachers. They're the pros. They know best. We can best leverage their expertise by making our curriculum continuously better so that we continue to individualize learning in our increasingly diverse classrooms.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: given that I hear from teachers who are concerned about these attacks on Inspiring Education, what is your commitment to moving forward with its ideals and objectives?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, Inspiring Education is a result of unprecedented consultation with Albertans, everyone from parents to teachers to employers to school board superintendents to students. It's by Albertans. It's for Albertans. It's Albertans' vision for education. I want teachers and school boards out there to know that we're committed to it. We'll stand by them as they fight through the empty rhetoric. While the opposition may want to dismantle it, we'll stand up for it. This government is for Inspiring Education.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Airdrie, you can – oh, you've switched spots?

Mr. McAllister: Yeah.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Rocky View, go ahead.

Mr. McAllister: It seemed appropriate, Mr. Speaker.

Last night my leader and I hosted a telephone town hall with Albertans. [interjections] Thirty-five thousand people took part at some point last night. A teacher called in saying that in his school junior high teachers are questioning elementary teachers about why they are having to reteach the basics. The Education minister seems oblivious to what's going on. If all this is well, why are junior high teachers asking elementary teachers why they have to reteach the basics?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, one, I think, that we've acknowledged. Through the curriculum redesign we're going to re-emphasize the basics. It's not a matter of basics or inquiry-based learning; it's both. We want our kids to have the basics, but we want them to be able to apply those to problem solving. We need to listen to employers and look at global best practices as well as look at some of the petitions and the rhetoric coming out of the opposition. It's interesting that they would cut off the speakers in the call last night that didn't agree with their rhetoric.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of Albertans would disagree with this gentleman.

Given that this same teacher also told us that elementary school teachers respond to the junior high teachers by saying that we, too, have to reteach the basics because the fundamentals aren't being

properly taught, does the minister not see that there is a problem here that needs addressing, or will he continue to bury his head in the sand and ignore teachers and parents?

2:20

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many questions we want to waste in the House, asking the same question over and over and over. This member asked on March 4 if I would "do the right thing and ensure, not provide an option but ensure, that the fundamentals of mathematics like times tables are taught in our schools," and I said: yes, I will. I've said: yes, I will. I said: yes, we will. We're doing a curriculum redesign, and we're going to make sure that the foundational pieces of literacy and numeracy are emphasized throughout all subjects. We said we will, but it's not one or the other.

It's interesting. Last night on the call with Dr. Tran-Davies, whom they tried to put in a box and say that all she's trying to purport is that we teach basics. . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. McAllister: I do take exception to one point. Not one question on education is a waste of time in this House. [interjections]

The minister's spin is being exposed. Parents, teachers, experts are loud and clear on this issue. Does he realize that what he's saying contradicts what tens of thousands of Albertans say is actually happening in our schools every day, or has his government clearly lost touch with how regular, everyday Albertans feel?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think every one of the callers on that call last night was a regular, everyday Albertan, but they didn't want to hear from everyone. They cut off the ones that didn't agree with their rhetoric. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I think it's shameful that this party would purport to Albertans that our system is on the skids, as this member has said, that our numbers, our test scores, have fallen by 30 per cent internationally, which of course we know is not true. It's a 2 and a half per cent decrease. [interjections] We have incredible school board trustees, incredible teachers, and an incredible curriculum. They're doing a heck of a good job. We have one of the best systems on the entire planet, but we can make it better.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Second reminder, hon. members. You know, there's little that I can do to help keep control in this Assembly if you're not able to control yourselves. So again I ask with the utmost respect: please, listen to the questions even if you don't like them; listen to the answers even if you don't like them. Let's try and make some progress here, as is expected of us.

Calgary-Buffalo, let's hear how you do, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Drilling in Urban Areas

Mr. Hehr: For close to two years we've been hearing from this government that they would be bringing forth an urban drilling policy. Today, unbelievably, we learn that the Minister of Energy is – get this – appointing a task force to review urban drilling. To the minister: why do you continue to shirk your responsibilities to the Alberta people by delaying? Why not just show some real-life leadership and produce this policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said the other day, it's important for me to be able to hear from Albertans. I have spoken with our two outstanding MLAs that represent the region. I've spoken with the mayor and will continue to speak to people in the Lethbridge region to find out some issues. It's also about education, making sure people already know what rules apply, what kind of setbacks apply. To go out and talk to people, which they have asked us to do, is responsible, and I'm doing what Albertans are asking.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, that answer was complete and utter bunk, and the minister knows it.

Your ministry has said for two years that they were going to produce a policy. Where is the policy, and when are you going to stop hiding behind these task forces and get on with the business of providing families and communities with certainty around urban drilling?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is using the word "task force." What I've talked about is having round-tables, that we're going to bring people together at. We're going to bring in people in northern Alberta, in central Alberta, and in southern Alberta to make sure that people, first of all, understand the rules that we have in place. The safety of Albertans is first and foremost. We want to make sure that the evacuation plans are in place, whether you live in urban or rural Alberta. But, first and foremost, people want the education piece so they actually understand what the rules are that we have in place today.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I'm befuddled here, so I'll ask it again. Your ministry has been at this for two years. They've stated for two years they would develop an urban drilling policy. Are you guys unable to do this? Are you incompetent? What is the problem, that you cannot deliver an urban drilling policy despite all the rhetoric from that side?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have said from day one, since I've been the Minister of Energy, that we will develop an urban drilling policy, but we'll do it based on facts, do it based on education. Currently, depending the level of sour in these wells, they go from setbacks of either 100 metres to 1,500 metres. There is a lot of information that needs to be shown and given to Albertans first, and as I have said already, we will have an urban drilling policy, but we'll do it in consultation with urban and rural Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, those answers just aren't good enough.

The government promised a review of urban fracking and a set of rules in 2012, then they promised to review a set of rules in 2013, and then they promised a definitive set of rules for right about now. Instead, we're getting another review or, excuse me, a round-table. This record would be a parody of a government – it would be funny – if it didn't actually come from this government's refusal to represent the most obvious of public interests over those of oil and gas. To the minister: when will this government stand up for Albertans and tell industry, "No urban drilling"?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government stands up for Albertans every single day of the week in Alberta. It is

important. The drilling in this province provides great economic development in this province, but we make sure that we take care of the environmental concerns and the safety concerns every time an application goes before the regulator. Those are the rules that they look at to make sure that there are safety issues there. All of those are part of the regulatory process, and that is what is looked at before any – any – application is approved in urban or rural Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that a poll in Lethbridge found that 76 per cent of residents want a ban on urban drilling and given that the mayor, the town council, and both school boards have all publicly stated the same and given that you just got a petition with 11,000 signatures on it asking for a ban, can the minister tell this Assembly just how many tens of thousands of regular Albertans it takes to earn the same influence as one phone call from your friends in the oil and gas industry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said the other day to the House, there is no application even before the regulator. The discussion on urban drilling and the discussion on drilling in this province are important discussions regardless of where you live because safety issues, making sure we have the rules, all of those are very important to my people who live in rural Alberta, to all of the people in Alberta, whether you live in urban or rural Alberta. We are looking at all of this, but we're making sure that we're balancing this and making sure that we're having the time to go through this properly.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this minister has had more than enough time.

Now, given that this task force is, in fact, just another delay tactic by this government to serve their friends in oil and gas and given that the issue of fracking within a few hundred metres of homes and schools and playgrounds is a no-brainer to most Albertans and only requires more study if someone has lost all sense of their democratic obligation to the citizens they represent, why won't this minister stand up for regular Albertans and ban urban drilling now?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand up every day for Albertans, urban or rural Albertans. I have talked to other communities that are cities as well, that are urban municipalities, such as the city of Medicine Hat, other municipalities that are urban that actually like and appreciate having the development in their communities. It does not matter where we do development in this province as long as it is done safely and through a strong regulatory process. That's what's really important. What's important is that we're talking to Albertans, and that's exactly what I'm going to do at this round-table, listen to the people who count. Those people are the Albertans here in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Stony Plain.

Building Alberta Plan Advertising

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This out-of-touch PC government just can't learn from its mistakes. The budget for their partisan Building Alberta sign campaign has been increased to \$1.9 million from \$1.7 million last year. Our FOIP found another \$200,000 spent by the Infrastructure minister. To the minister: I know your party is struggling to raise money, but do you really

think taxpayers want to keep funding this PC Party advertising campaign instead of building Alberta, building the roads, schools, hospitals, and long-term . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the hon. member is sensitive about us telling Albertans what we would build that they wouldn't. I understand he's unhappy about that. In fact, when Albertans see those signs, they know a school is going to be there. I can tell you that in my municipality when they see a sign from the development saying "a school," they don't believe it. When they see a Building Alberta sign, they know a school is going to be there. It matters to them. When they're going down the highway and they see a sign, they want to know what's going on in the construction. It matters. It's good information for Albertans. They want that information. We'll continue to build Alberta and give the information.

2:30

Mr. Barnes: Wildrose would do the projects, we wouldn't burden the next generation, and we would not politicize the process.

Mr. Speaker, given that this government can't seem to find money for many needed projects like the Strathcona community hospital, the Misericordia, the 50 new schools it promised in 2012, the Fort McMurray hospital, and Fort McMurray long-term community care, does the minister think his new sign money could be better spent, or do you even care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the fact is that we're building the infrastructure that matters to Albertans. That side wouldn't burden Albertans with classrooms. They wouldn't burden Albertans with highways. They wouldn't burden Albertans with the hospitals that they need. We're actually building them. We're building in a responsible way that makes financial sense, and we're doing it on a schedule. They'd have people waiting until they're 16 to start grade 1 instead of six. We're building schools today, when they're needed.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Enough. You see what's happened? One side baits the other, then the other side, and then it gets out of control, and we can't hear each other.

Mrs. Forsyth: They don't answer the questions.

The Speaker: And I particularly don't like it, Calgary-Fish Creek, when you speak while I'm speaking. Show some respect for the chair regardless of who's in it.

Final supplemental. Now, let's listen carefully to the question – I'm sure it'll be a good one – and let's listen to the answer, which I hope will be equally good. Let's hear how it goes.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would build Alberta and balance the budget.

Building Alberta Plan Advertising (continued)

Mr. Barnes: Given that a hospital in Wainwright is currently facing closure due to a potential sewage backup because of this

PC government's neglect, will the minister recommit this money from these PC partisan signs to upgrading the Wainwright health centre and for once put the needs of Albertans ahead of the needs of the PC Party?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, Albertans' needs are the only needs we consider every single day when we come into this House, and we decide what those needs are by listening to Albertans. I know there's partisan rhetoric that sounds good, but in fact the building Alberta plan is designed after listening to what Albertans want: the hospitals, the schools, the roads, the other infrastructure. That's what we've been doing. That's what we'll continue to do. I know the hon. member doesn't like to tell Albertans how much we're doing that they wouldn't do, but we're going to continue to do it because that's what Albertans sent us here to do, and that's what we're doing under this Premier. We're delivering on the building Alberta plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day we hear from the opposition and this government's critics about our rising debt. In my constituency people are asking: how can we go around touting our excellent financial situation and announce more infrastructure projects while we are borrowing to build these projects? To the minister of the Treasury Board and Finance: what am I supposed to tell my constituents about our growing debt in this province?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the borrowing plan that we have is strategic. It's responsible. We only borrow for the infrastructure that Albertans need today because we're building it today. The opposition has already talked about deferring the capital plan out into the out-years, but they don't tell Albertans which school they'd defer, which hospital from the list that the hon. member just rattled off they would defer. Borrowing to build now protects Albertans from construction cost increases each year, which are guaranteed to go up. With our population growing by almost 300 people a day, the people need these infrastructure projects today, not in the future. They'll have tangible assets. Ideological opposition to any . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will we address the repayment of debt if there are drastic changes in interest rates?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. It's true that our triple-A credit rating, that we have and hold dear, allows us to lock in the lowest possible rates, and right now interest rates are probably the lowest they've been in 50 years. The borrowing program isn't like a personal line of credit, that can be affected by fluctuating interest rates. We're selling bonds, many of them with 20- or five- or 10- or 30-year amortizations. The interest we pay on those bonds is locked in for their maturity, and we set aside money each year to match up that maturity.

I was going to say that the ideological opposition to any other form of finance besides cash is not good financial management, Mr. Speaker. It's fanaticism.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure risks associated with borrowing for capital projects are mitigated?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, government has taken concrete, legislative steps to keep our debt well under control. We have limited borrowing, placed a cap on debt servicing . . .

Mr. Anderson: Please keep talking. Just keep talking.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, for God's sake, enough is enough.

Mr. Anderson: I'm so sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I know you are. I've heard your sincere apologies before, and I don't buy them anymore, so please. I'm not in a good mood with your behaviour today. I have communicated with your leader, I have communicated with the person on her left, and now I'm communicating with you.

Hon. President of Treasury Board, I'm sorry to ask you to do this, but could you start over so that we can hear this answer, because I certainly could not.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has taken concrete, legislative steps to keep the debt well under control. We have limited borrowing by placing a cap on the debt-servicing costs. The interest paid on the debt cannot exceed 3 per cent of operational revenue. [interjection] The hon. member might want to listen to the answer because it is his critic portfolio.

That means that if the operational revenue drops or if interest rates increase, our borrowing limit will go down, which means we will have to clear off that debt. Again, we set money to the side right off the top, including the debt repayment.

The Speaker: Let's move on. Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

International and Intergovernmental Relations Ministry

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that new positions and new titles have popped up within the highest offices of the International and Intergovernmental Relations ministry. Last week I was disappointed the minister could not confirm fair and open competitions on IIR jobs. I know that other ministries have deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers, but it seems a new title has been borrowed from Alberta Energy. To the Associate Minister of IIR: can she please explain to the House why there's a minister, an associate minister, a deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers – plural – and now a chief assistant deputy minister?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand why we have a minister and a deputy minister. I was also appointed as associate minister, with a special focus on Asia, and to also chair the Asia Advisory Council as part of our government's plan to open new markets and enhance our presence in important markets. The international strategy is featured prominently in our building Alberta plan, and that's why we now have a chief assistant deputy minister for international.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, given that the Ministry of IIR has adopted the Alberta Health Services model of managers managing managers managing yet more managers, does the minister really think that appointing yet another manager, a new chief assistant

deputy minister, is going to help with the image of entitlement and waste that permeates this government?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans know and appreciate is that this government works every day to open new markets, to create opportunities for business in Alberta to do business in the world. We are a province that trades out into the world, and that's an exceedingly important part of our economy, our community, and our quality of life. This government strives every day to have the people in place and the structure in place so that we can help Albertans sell their products out to the world, and we do not apologize for doing that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government claims to have held the line on spending with this budget – yet the truth is that non flood spending rose by 7 per cent – and given that the full-time employee count for core government positions is rising by a thousand positions this fiscal year, is the creation of these new fancy titles in order to flaunt and hide ADMs across the public service? What has the government in mind when it talks about commitment to living within its means?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, what that hon. member would know if he had any experience in the real world at all would be that you organize your structure to do your business. [interjections] You don't hire people unless you need them. When you hire them, you put them in the right place, and you pay them the right amount to do the right job. We're trading out into the world, we're creating new markets, we're helping Alberta business do business in the world, and that is very important to Albertans' quality of life. We want to do that, we want to do it right, and we want to do it with the right people.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you have a point of order to raise, stand up and raise it. We don't need the finger pointing.

Let's go on. Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Medicine Hat.

Bonnyville-Cold Lake Infrastructure Funding

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not the first time I've gotten up and asked a question on the CRISP report. The CRISP is a high-level document that has no real substance or actual listed infrastructure for my Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency. The CRISP report is supposed to be a long-term strategic plan for population growth and infrastructure needs in the Cold Lake oil sands area. To the Minister of Energy: what concrete actions for my area have taken place as a result of the CRISP report?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:40

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to say thank you to this hon. member for how she represents her constituents. She does an outstanding job making sure every day that everyone in cabinet understands how important her area is to this province, so I want to thank her for that.

Mr. Speaker, it is a high-level document, it is about long-term planning, and it is getting ahead of those issues, so the infrastructure, the transportation needs, all of the social needs of the community. We're working together with Municipal Affairs, with Transportation, and with Infrastructure to prioritize the needs for her area and for her communities.

Mrs. Leskiw: My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Transportation. The report identifies twinning and increased lane capacity for highways 28, 55, and 881 to the Bonnyville and Cold Lake areas. When can we expect to see progress on this critical infrastructure in my area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been out to this area in her constituency with the member and listened to her community members and her concerns, but I can assure you that my department gets many requests from all communities and municipalities across this province. The task is the balance, balancing the priorities. Balancing and looking at safety is always number one. Market access is also important in prioritizing these projects as well as the budget restrictions and the dollars we have available.

Mrs. Leskiw: That may be very good, but we are the second-largest oil sands in the province.

To the same minister. The minister of SRD has just recently identified Cold Lake as the regional water source of my constituency. When can we expect capital funding dollars for this project, that will provide safe drinking water to my entire area?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a potential Water for Life project, but, not unlike the roads, lots of municipalities have needs. They've applied to the Water for Life project, and they're important in all communities. The task that we have is a balance. We've got all these priorities. We've got to prioritize the list and build the ones for the money we have. We've got to look at the needs of the project. We've got to look at the costs and all other priorities. Unfortunately, this project will not be funded in the next budget, but we're always working with municipalities to meet their needs.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we only got through 15 main questions, a total of 90 questions and answers, as a result of too many interjections by you yourselves. Now, it doesn't matter to me whether we get 15 or 20 questions up. I'd like as many as possible, however, to get up. Today you didn't really help yourselves in that regard. Two days ago we had 108 questions and answers, 18 full sets. Let's aspire to something similar to that again tomorrow.

In 30 seconds from now we will resume with Members' Statements, and that would start with Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Red Deer-North.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a recent conversation with a retired general who still had school-aged children, he told me one of the biggest reasons that he chose to retire here in Alberta was because of our education system. He talked of having soldiers up for transfer who were nearly in tears because their children were not going to be educated here, in the best system in Canada.

We've heard much criticism in this House of late regarding our curriculum redesign. Everything needs to grow and change to

survive, even scholastics and methods of how we do things. Through the vision of Inspiring Education, our government is committed to preparing students today for a successful future. Our commitment to excellence is why we're redesigning the curriculum to focus on literacy, numeracy, and 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking and problem solving.

We are developing a curriculum that uses the best of both basic skills such as arithmetic and reading and inquiry-based learning, which develops additional skills. Alberta is at the top because we have taken action and grown by investing in our youth and putting the success of children first. At the end of the day we must ask ourselves: are we preparing our children for their future or our past?

A recent article in the *Calgary Herald*, which I will table, by Jim Brandon and Dianne Gereluk outlined necessary points to be considered. In it they make mention of the

need to go beyond the traditional ways of schooling that has focused on rote memory, repetition and worksheets . . . beyond simply teaching students to write to the test with little understanding of the application of these issues in other contexts.

Why wouldn't we want to push the boundaries and set our youth up to excel in every way? Evolution is a natural occurrence, and it happens everywhere. As a government we choose to change with the times and prepare our students for excellence.

Thank you.

Vision Assessments for Schoolchildren

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, if you removed your glasses, would you struggle to read the notes in front of you? Could you see a blackboard or a whiteboard 20 feet away? If everyone who wears glasses or contact lenses removed them, how good would their literacy be? How hard would they have to struggle to read the newspaper, an e-mail, a magazine, or a book? Imagine if you had to struggle every day without your glasses or contacts? Half of your daily energy would be spent trying to compensate for this. Imagine how difficult it would be if you didn't even know you had a problem with vision.

There are children in school who struggle every day with compensating for poor vision. These children depend on the adults in their lives to make the right decisions. If they had a broken bone or a high fever, their parents would rush them to emergency. But what if there is no raging fever or broken bone, no outward sign of a physical or visual problem? What would be the trigger to encourage a parent to have their child's eyes checked?

We are told to get an annual physical checkup every year for early detection of unseen dysfunction or disease. It is just as important to include a complete visual examination as part of an early prevention program. By sending children to school every day who have not had a complete visual checkup and who may have problems with eyesight, we set them up for failure. Visual impediments that have not been addressed can lead to frustrated children who fidget in their chairs, have behaviour problems, suffer with social problems, and struggle to get good grades.

Dr. Charles Boulet and Dr. Noella Piquette of the University of Lethbridge believe that it is a violation of a child's human rights to not address visual impediments that they may have. My private member's bill, Bill 203, Childhood Vision Assessment Act, requires that every child have a complete eye exam as part of grade 1 registration. This simple step would have profound results for the 25 per cent of children who suffer with visual impediments and don't even know it. Eighty per cent of learning requires good vision. By requiring visual testing as part of the routine to prepare

a child for school, we provide them with a critical and powerful tool for success. Their success is our success. Bill 203 will make a profound difference in a child's life.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Government Policies

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and the aggressive progressives: adapted from a Peggy Noonan column. The mischievous meddling of this out-of-touch PC government is hurting our province. There are few areas where they aren't making it worse. We're suffering from the politicization of too much of our lives. Government is growing in destructive not helpful ways. Fees and rules increase. Common sense says that we're losing a vital part of ourselves through deliberate decisions to move from local to central planning.

Ridiculous rules and regulations abound, from starting a business to feeding people driven from their homes by a threatening prairie fire. It's all part and parcel of the same malady. So is the erosion of the idea that religious scruples and beliefs have a high place that must culturally and politically be respected. On Twitter recently someone asked: can the government compel a Jewish baker to deliver a wedding cake on a Saturday; if not, why not? Why not indeed. Because the truly tolerant give each other a little space.

I think a lot of people right now feel like a guy in a car driving down a street that some bureaucrat just decided should be one way, the oncoming way. He's dodging the vehicles as they speed towards him, but soon there are too many. So he turns around and is going with the flow but not to a destination of his own choosing, and he can't find an exit until 2016.

2:50

That's how people feel about the demands and dictates of the burgeoning bureaucracy. Most voters believe they can make the best decisions for themselves, but the PCs disagree. Imagine that your wages have been frozen, that some co-workers have been laid off. You need a new school. One is announced but without a guaranteed start date, and no local contractors can bid on it.

People are overwhelmed by PC government ineptness. True conservatives feel exhausted from trying to fight back on so many fronts. But the progressives, too, are damaged. They look whipped and incoherent. If they win, they'll win year by year less of a province. We can't let that happen.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, are clear evidence that the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary education system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the associate minister.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the leader of the Liberal opposition I have several tablings connected with the question that he asked earlier today. The first is the results of a FOIP requesting correspondence between the office of the Premier and Jaime Watt, who is the executive chairman of Navigator.

The second is the website printout of Navigator Ltd. referencing their staff, which was also in the question, plus a particular biography from that same website on Mr. Watt and a number of other members of that Navigator team that were referenced in the leader's question.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table the requisite number of copies of a letter between myself and Minister Jason Kenney, the federal MP, and it's dated March 18, 2014. The letter relates to the provincial efforts to purchase the land known as Willow Square in Fort McMurray, and it outlines that we have been very aggressively pursuing that land. In addition, there are two attached letters. One of the letters that's attached to it is a letter from hon. Minister Ric McIver, where he has indicated the province's desire to purchase the land known as Willow Square in Fort McMurray. The second attachment is a letter dated October 28, where I set out several solutions and indicate to Minister Kenney that the province is very eager to acquire that land so that we can fulfill the vision that seniors have had on that facility. I would propose to table that now.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the five requisite copies of the first page of a large petition that was presented to the government of Canada by some of my constituents who are asking for tougher laws and the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death. They're requesting that the Criminal Code of Canada be changed to define the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter as well as five other recommendations aimed at toughening these laws. By tabling this today, I'm helping to draw attention to this very serious issue and indicating my support for their efforts.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of a bunch of documents encompassing 6,100 people who have signed a document indicating that they wish and urge the government of Alberta to not move forward to build the seniors' long-term care facility in Parsons Creek but, rather, to immediately consider building it in the downtown Fort McMurray area near the hospital on land currently owned or controlled by the province. I do have the requisite copies. All of these individuals are of voting age. I can tell you that this group is not going away – it's not going away – and the MLAs should start listening to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, to my recollection, we have one formal point of order, which was raised at approximately 2:08 p.m. by the Government House Leader presumably with reference to some comments made by the leader of the ND opposition, which also prompted the Speaker to intervene.

Now, just before we go there, I want to read two citations myself. The first one comes from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009. On page 614, about the middle of the page, it reads the following:

Allusions to the presence or absence of a Member or Minister in the Chamber are unacceptable. Speakers have upheld this prohibition on the ground that “there are many places that Members have to be in order to carry out all of the obligations that go with their office”.

That applies to every single one of us, not just to members of cabinet and not just to opposition but to all of us.

Secondly, in *Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, on page 141, subsection 481 reads as follows:

Besides the prohibitions contained in Standing Order 18, it has been sanctioned by usage that a Member, while speaking, must not . . .

(c) refer to the presence or absence of specific Members.

I don’t think that could be any clearer. We have referred to this before.

What I found unacceptable today, from my perspective – never mind what the points of order here are going to be right away, which are on this topic, I’m sure – is that in spite of having been cautioned, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood proceeded to dig yet a deeper hole in this respect. At that point I indicated that I would likely come back to him and offer him a chance, before we take up more valuable time, to comment and, perhaps, if he wishes, to withdraw those comments.

So let me start there. If there is someone who wishes to make that withdrawal on his behalf, I would be very happy to have it and hear it and the sincerity with which it comes, and then we’ll try and move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your references. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood does apologize, but . . . [interjections] May I finish?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’m judging this not only in the words being said but the tone, the manner, and the sincerity with which they are said. Regardless of whether you like what’s being said or not, I want to hear it.

Hon. member, you have the floor. Please continue.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, definitely, the member does apologize.

The only comment that I’ll make in addition to the apology is that we have repeatedly not received any notification of the absence or presence of a member, which we have for other ministers but have not in the case of the one member. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was feeling a little frustrated after daily preparing questions to be directed toward the member on the opposite side, intending or expecting that their presence would be here. I’m being very careful and not referring to the person at the moment. So the comment that I wanted to make was that repeatedly we’ve not been receiving any notification, where we normally do when there is going to be an absence from the front bench, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. I listened very carefully to that, and I see that there are some extenuating comments in that withdrawal, which I want to think about for a moment.

I want to recognize the Government House Leader. You had a point here that you wanted to raise in respect to the point I just raised.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the point you raised, I think it’s important to understand that any cabinet minister in question period can answer any question that’s being asked. The fact that, you know, they’re saying that somebody is not in the House to me doesn’t carry any weight because any minister on the front bench or in the back can answer a question at any given time, and we’re all prepared to answer those questions, especially as they relate to our own ministries.

Also, the Premier’s schedule is one that is scheduled for her. She’s a very important individual in this House, and she has very important work to do. There are times when she’s not going to be in the House. Sometimes it’s a case of an emergency that she has other business that has to be attended to. Again, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, we all can answer on behalf of the Premier in this House at any given time.

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I raise this not with respect to particularly the Premier, who is the subject of the debate at the moment, but with respect to any one of us, any single one of us, and it matters not to me whether it’s a government member, an opposition member, or an independent member. The fact is that we have these rules. Some of them are very old, tried-and-true rules, but they exist for a reason. They exist for the respect of the institution that we all pledged to serve, the institution that we took an oath to help serve, to uphold.

I would ask you again – this is not the first time – to please ensure that you know the rules. You’re in the game; make sure you know the rules. If you don’t, go back and read some of the comments that I’ve made because I’ve commented on many of them which are frequently referred to in this House. Let’s not have any more purposely broken rules.

In the meantime, hon. Government House Leader, you might want to address the comments that Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview made. I don’t know what arrangements you have about responding to requests for who’s available to take questions or not.

It’s very true that any member of the front bench or the bench that is occupied by associate ministers can answer any question at any time on behalf of anyone from cabinet. That is very true. So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I’d ask you to keep that in mind as well. This knife cuts both ways.

That having been said, let me remind you that the legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and this evening for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Health in committee room A and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and Finance in committee room B. This evening Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates of Infrastructure in committee room A.

I neglected to say that that point of order is now concluded, the one just referred to.

The House is adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:02 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 20, 2014

Issue 12

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 20, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, the duties we inherit upon becoming elected members of an Assembly such as this are difficult to describe, and they impact each of us in very different and very personal if not unique ways. However, we are all very acutely aware of the strain and the stress that is put upon our families and our loved ones, who share what many would describe as the burden of public office. Bearing that in mind, let us pray for the well-being of our families, of our friends in addition to the well-being of all Albertans, who sent us here to be of service to them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member for Lesser Slave Lake 25th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, on that note, today actually marks a very special anniversary which deserves special recognition in our Assembly. On March 20, 1989, that being 25 years ago, a particular member was elected to this Assembly for the first time. She has since been re-elected seven consecutive, successive elections. [Standing ovation] Hon. members, the thunder is well deserved, but it has been stolen from your Speaker.

She has been re-elected seven successive elections, and this is truly a remarkable achievement. Eight hundred and twenty-nine members have been elected to this Assembly since 1905, and only 15 of those members to date have served for 25 years or more. The member in question becomes the 16th in this line and the first woman ever to reach that milestone. [applause] My thunder is stolen twice in one day. Well deserved.

Now may I ask this hon. member to please come forward and receive a special token of thanks on behalf of all Albertans and especially colleagues in this Assembly for 25 outstanding years of service to the province of Alberta. For this we have a special commemorative pin, which I would like to place on your person in recognition of this milestone.

Ms Calahasen: Be careful where you pin that.

The Speaker: I don't think I have felt this nervous since my wedding day. There we are.

Hon. members, please join me in thanking the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Thank you, hon. members. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, we know you have several guests, and I would invite you now to introduce them all to us, please.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago today a small group of family and friends truly believed that this trapper's daughter could bring a different perspective to this Legislature. Without a structured organization and without any money they pulled off a miracle. Today I am very proud to introduce to you and through

you to the members of this Assembly some of my family and friends who played a major role in getting me elected. I ask that they rise as I call their names. Seated in your gallery are Ann Marie Auger from Slave Lake, Solomon Auger from Slave Lake, and Michael Auger originally from Slave Lake. Seated in the public gallery are Yvonne Anderson and Jim Robertson from Grouard and Sherry Anderson and Gil Giroux from Gift Lake. Seated in the members' gallery are some of my family: Helen Calahasen, Freda Dennison, Mena Calahasen, and Roland Calahasen. Unfortunately, my daughter is not in the country and couldn't be here, and my husband had to work because somebody has to bring in the money. I ask that all the members in this Assembly give my guests a very hearty welcome to this Legislature.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Congratulations, once again.

Respected members, it's with great pleasure that I introduce two very special young people who are seated as my guests in the Speaker's gallery. They are here with their family, friends, and representatives of Alberta Easter Seals. Those would be the Easter Seals stamps that greeted you as you entered. First, I want to introduce seven-year-old Portia Dugan, who is this year's Easter Seals ambassador. She is seated in the wheelchair there with her caregiver. She enjoys art, swimming, and especially riding her bike. Thank you, Portia, for coming.

Secondly, I'd like to introduce 13-year-old Jacob Dunn. Jacob is from northern Alberta and was the ambassador in 2013-14. He lives with a kidney disease that challenges his active life, but in spite of that he did a yeoman's job this past year as the Easter Seals ambassador. He received the Speaker's special merit award for outstanding service. Congratulations, and thank you to you, Jacob.

Portia's parents, Isabel Marangoni and Michael Dugan, are here along with grandmother Pierina Marangoni. Please rise. Jacob's mother, Jennifer Dunn, is here. Representing Alberta Easter Seals are Jodi Zabłudowski, the director of operations, and Darla Zuk, events manager, who do a tremendous job for Easter Seals, whose campaign started yesterday. Good luck to all of you, and thank you for what you're doing for thousands of Albertans.

Let us move on to the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from the Glen Avon school in St. Paul. They are spending the afternoon here today at the Legislature, and they are joined by their teachers, Mr. Shane Boyko, Mrs. Karen Kendel, Mrs. Linda O'Neill, and teaching aide Mrs. Rhonda Collins. I have been informed that Mrs. O'Neill's birthday is on Saturday, but I won't tell all Albertans which birthday it is. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups or youth to be introduced?

If not, let us move on, then, to the Associate Minister of Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise. I don't get to do this very often, have people here from my constituency in southern Alberta. I would like to introduce to you and through you to everybody here two ladies, Ms Sheila Rogers and Ms Karin Champion. Both of these ladies have been hard-working, active people in Lethbridge that have

been involved in the No Drilling Lethbridge campaign and are here today as their petition with over 11,000 names will be tabled by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill a little later on. I'd like to ask both ladies to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you the wife of someone that many of the members here in the Assembly know, Lanny Westersund. His wife, Annie Graham, and her friend Dana Jans are with us today. Annie and Lanny are constituents of mine in Calgary-Klein, and I can honestly say that Annie is the best thing that's ever happened to Lanny. If they could rise and be given the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly, that would be great.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members four guests. Mare Donly and Linda McFarlane are members of the Calgary Social Workers for Social Justice Committee, a subcommittee of the Alberta College of Social Workers, and are in Edmonton to present at the ACSW conference on Friday. Their interest in social justice issues keep them active in the areas of long-term care, affordable housing, and poverty reduction. With them are Joe Ceci and Mike Brown, also in Edmonton to present at the ACSW conference. Many of you will recognize Joe from his time serving as an alderman in the city of Calgary. Today they are representing Action To End Poverty in Alberta. I would ask Mare, Linda, Joe, and Mike to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ruth Adria, who is a retired nurse and a passionate advocate for seniors. I'd ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my outstanding staff from our Calgary office. Mr. Craig Watt is here to join us in question period. Craig, thanks for being here. Let's give him the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Stony Plain.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Shauna McHarg and Dennis Dupuis. Shauna and Dennis have been made victims of our embattled health care system. As advocates for their family members in care they've been punished for speaking up, banned from seeing their loved ones, when those loved ones need their support most.

They've asked for an opportunity to meet with the hon. Minister of Health. I have given him their names and e-mails, and I would ask him to give them a call to listen to their concerns. I'd ask all members of the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: A second introduction, hon. member?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Marguerite Saunter. Marguerite has come here many times before. She would like to draw attention to the fact that we should be advocating for our seniors and they should not ban advocates from seeing the ones who have built this wonderful province and country. I would ask everyone to give her the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Medicine Hat.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the hard-working mayor, council, and CAO of Parkland county. Parts of their municipality are also represented by George VanderBurg and our colleague Doug Horner. As a progressive rural community Parkland county council takes an active role in providing the necessities and leisure activities for all families in the region while preserving the natural distinction of the essence of their community. I would like to ask the members of Parkland county to please rise as I call their names and recognize them in the House: His Worship Mayor Rod Shaigec, Councillor AnnLisa Jensen, Councillor Jackie McCuaig, Councillor Phyllis Kobasiuk, Councillor Tracey Melnyk, Councillor Darrell Hollands, and the CAO, Pat Vincent. I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're just reminded to not use first or last names of members who are elected in this Assembly.

Mr. Lemke: Yikes. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: Apology noted and accepted.

Let us move on. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you nine individuals in the social work program at Medicine Hat College. They are in Edmonton to take part in the Alberta College of Social Workers conference and wanted to visit the Legislature to better understand the policy-making that can affect their future careers. The individuals are Hannah Berger, Mark Codlin, Jamie-Lee Danielsen, Kristel Kirstein, Jennifer McBride, Aimee Sarsons, Sarah Schnell, Jason Thunberg, and instructor Richard Gregory. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Airdrie it gives me pleasure to introduce to you and through you 74 guests from George McDougall high school, the hon. member's alma mater, I would assume. Accompanying the students today are Mrs. Devon Sawby and parent helpers Mrs. Nicky Addo-Bond and Ms Lisa Brown. I would ask them to all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Alberta Economic Development Authority

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the important work of the Alberta Economic Development Authority, or AEDA. Established two decades ago, AEDA has been the go-to adviser to the Premier and cabinet on issues affecting Alberta's economy. AEDA has identified strategic solutions to a full range of economic challenges, including job creation, skills and education, productivity, and competitiveness as well as market access.

Last fall AEDA was improved when the Alberta Economic Development Authority Amendment Act was passed. The new act restructures the governance of AEDA and integrates the work of the Alberta Competitiveness Council.

In January our Premier announced the newly appointed AEDA board. These newly appointed members are senior-level executives who are leaders in their community, Mr. Speaker, and the vast knowledge and expertise that they volunteer will serve our province very, very well. I want to personally thank the chair, Barry Heck, and his executive board.

This smaller and more focused 12-member board will sharpen its mandate and focus on the priorities of diversifying Alberta's economy and helping to expand our markets. The quality of life of Albertans depends on the decisions government makes now, and many of those decisions will indeed be strengthened with AEDA's advice.

With international expertise in the financial, energy, agriculture, and technological industries the new board will help this government ensure that it has the right tools to continue building a better Alberta. That's building Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

AEDA's annual report is being tabled in the Legislature today, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to go through it cover to cover.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and leader of the Liberal opposition.

Public Service

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin by thanking the Premier for her service to our great province. We all know public service isn't easy. It involves a lot of personal sacrifice, a lot of time away from family and friends, sometimes facing just a little bit of criticism. So once again, Premier, I would like to thank you for your service to this province. I wish you and your family the very best on behalf of the Alberta Liberals.

However, now that the Premier's leadership has come to an end, a new leadership is needed to stop the attack on workers' rights and public service pensions. As the governing party looks to put a fresh face on an old and tired government, Albertans are looking for leadership out of the legal and ethical quagmire of the past. The next administration needs to end the government's attacks on workers' rights and repeal Bill 45 and Bill 46 as a mandatory first step.

In recent months the government has launched a three-pronged attack on working Albertans, the very people that build this province. They passed Bill 45, which infringes on sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by making it illegal to

even talk about illegal strikes, and Bill 46, that strips the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees of its collective bargaining rights, something that Premier Lougheed ensured.

The Progressive Conservative government is also moving quickly to drastically alter the pension benefits of public servants, without demonstrating convincingly the need for changes or consulting those affected workers beforehand. Public servants have spent their lives actually building Alberta, and those who currently keep Alberta running are being told that they're paid too much and should contribute more and retire later with less. It's fiscally and morally wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals stand here in support of all public servants, the heroes that build this wonderful and great province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Just before we start the clock, please be reminded that 35 seconds is allowed for the question, 35 seconds is allowed for the answer, and no preambles after spot 5.

Let us begin. We can start the clock with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main question.

Government Effectiveness

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join the Liberal leader in thanking the Premier for her service and thanking her family for the sacrifice. We do wish her well.

Mr. Speaker, for the third time in eight years the PCs will search for a new leader, and the business of governing our province will take a back seat to the internal politics of the PC Party. Albertans are frustrated that once again the instability and infighting that has seized the PC Party will result in priorities not being met and the people's business not getting done. To the Deputy Premier and soon-to-be interim Premier: can he assure Albertans that he'll be able to keep governing while his party sorts out yet another leadership crisis?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] This government was elected by the people of Alberta to fulfill an agenda, to set hope and prosperity for the future. We're doing just that. We'll continue to bring to this Legislature the legislation that's needed to do that. We'll pass the budget in this Legislature, or we'll ask this Legislature to pass the budget. We'll continue to govern responsibly for Albertans. [interjections] The leadership process is a separate process that happens out there, but we're here to provide good government to Albertans, and we're going to do that.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the Deputy Premier should reconsider running for leadership with that kind of a response.

Albertans are starting to see that the problems with this 43-year-old dynasty run far too deep for one leader to change. The government across the aisle is once again in disarray, desperately trying to keep their grip on power by putting a new face on their party to mask the internal strife that has now taken down two Premiers in three years. To the interim Premier: what policy direction will this government follow while the PC Party once again tries to figure out what, if anything, it believes in?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this government and this party share values with Albertans, which means that we want to have an

educated population who has the opportunity to trade out into the world, to have a quality of life that's better in Alberta than virtually anywhere else in North America, anywhere else in the world. It's the type of province that attracts 100,000 people a year, that grows because people want to be here. The type of government that this caucus and this government are going to provide is that kind of aspirational leadership for this province, so that people know that their children, their grandchildren can be educated here . . .

The Speaker: Time is up.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are looking for strong leadership from this provincial government, and they just aren't getting it. PCs always promise change and renewal when they get rid of their leader and then pick a new one, yet somehow we always end up right back here with the new leader gone and another leadership race under way. Each time the promises become more hollow. To the interim Premier: why doesn't he see that his party has lost the moral authority to govern this province?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right about one thing. After each election we end up right back here. We end up right back here, some of us, for 25 years. We end up right back here because we've had a tradition of providing good government for Albertans, we've had a tradition of understanding the values of Albertans, we've had a tradition of understanding the aspirations of Albertans, and we deliver the programs and the policies that Albertans want to grow forward. We're a government that knows about the past but lives for the future, and we do it together as a team. We do it together as a team. It's not one person. It's a whole group of people . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Budget 2014

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's right about one thing. We think the whole group of them are to blame for the situation we're in today.

There is a budget before this Assembly that was tabled under a Premier who will be officially replaced on Sunday. This budget borrows billions, raids the heritage fund, and commits Alberta taxpayers to \$820 million in interest payments alone by 2016. It's a bad budget, Mr. Speaker, and the Premier who brought it in will soon be gone. To the Finance minister, a simple question: was this her budget, or was it his budget?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it was our budget.

Ms Smith: That's what I thought, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2014 is merely a continuation of the disastrous long-standing fiscal policy of this PC government: spend more than we have, borrow the difference, and raid the savings accounts to keep on spending beyond our means. It's an approach that hasn't worked anywhere else in the world, yet this PC government insists on taking us down the debt and deficit path. To the interim Premier: is he going to continue with these reckless, costly, and unsustainable debt policies?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know better than this hon. member what this budget brings for the prosperity of the people in this province. [interjections] Our Finance minister and President

of Treasury Board has been travelling the province and talking to people about the budget, and there have been nothing but positive reactions. Members here have been over with AAMD and C this week and are hearing very positive reactions about the budget. It's a budget that paves the way forward for Albertans by creating the schools and the hospitals that we need for the future of this province, the programs that we need for the quality of life for citizens in this province. It about families and communities. It's about creating new markets. It's about building Alberta.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's about \$21 billion worth of debt by 2016, and he knows it.

If there is a glimmer of hope in the latest PC leadership crisis, it's that maybe, just maybe, we will finally get a leader, with principle, vision, and the courage to reverse the dreadful fiscal policies of previous Premiers. Now, I have my doubts, Mr. Speaker, but like most Albertans, I'm an optimist, so here it goes. Does anybody on that side who plans to replace this Premier have what it takes to fix the fiscal mess in this province and bring our books back into balance?

Mr. Hancock: All of us, Mr. Speaker, separately and together. This party and this government have been blessed over the 17 years that I've been here with leaders of principle, vision, and purpose, and as our party . . . [interjections] I know we don't talk about party politics in here, but as people talk about the future vision of this province, as they go out and engage with Albertans, we'll come back to this House with another leader of principle, vision, and purpose. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, people at home can't hear all the interjections, but I surely can. When somebody asking a question or somebody giving an answer has to try and shout overtop of the din and the noise, I think we've gone a little too far. Could I ask you to please curb your enthusiasm for the rest of question period?

Let's see how we do on the third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I have to say is that we are now on our third new leader in eight years, and that says it all.

Flood-related Buyouts in High River

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the problems in High River continue to be made worse by this government. One of our communities, Beachwood, has been declared in the floodway and must disappear, despite the fact that the town of High River and the developer completed provincially mandated dikes and berms after the 2005 flood. The risks of Beachwood were studied, and appropriate changes were made, all with the approval of this government, yet because of flawed maps which predate this community's construction, Beachwood will be wiped out. That will have a profound effect on High River. Why won't the minister see reason and save Beachwood?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know Beachwood well, I know High River well, and I know that what we're trying to do here is to ensure that all residents of High River are safe and are protected should there ever be another flood. This is an important step in that process. You cannot have communities that reside completely in a floodway where people are able to continue to live. It's not safe for people, it's not safe for the community, and frankly it's not safe for the rest of the community of High River.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's not what the government's own documents say. The government's document *Appropriate Use of a Flood Hazard Study* points out that flood hazard maps need to be updated after development. In this budget this government has earmarked funding for new flood maps. They know the 1992 maps are wrong. The town of High River knows the 1992 maps are wrong. The residents of Beachwood know the 1992 maps are wrong. Why does the Minister of Municipal Affairs continue to declare that Beachwood must go based on outdated 1992 maps?

2:00

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I think I've already answered the question, in essence. I can tell you that knowing that community, knowing that river, knowing southern Albertans, people are ready to move on. People want closure, and they want to move on. This hon. member is doing them no justice by opening up questions like this.

Ms Smith: I'm standing up for my constituents because they asked me to.

This government continues to bully and intimidate the remaining residents of Beachwood by refusing to recognize the very mitigation work that this government approved. This government has failed to update its own flood study map and uses outdated 1992 maps to force these residents out. This is wrong, and it will be a waste of \$30 million. Will the minister do the right thing, the compassionate thing, and the frugal thing and recognize that Beachwood is safe and let the residents stay in their homes?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I actually accept the advice of people who are technically competent on this topic. Those people who are technically competent on this subject do not recommend the course of action that this member is recommending. I listen to the experts, and we're moving forward to help the whole community of High River survive any possible future event. This is important to the whole community. It is an important initiative that is worth spending money on to support and keep people safe in the future in that community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Flood Recovery Communications Contracts

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am quite struck by the number of crossing lines involved with the contract for Navigator Ltd. to provide crisis management advice during the 2013 floods. Now, friendships and support are important in our lives, but politics, friendship, and special deals spending taxpayer money should stay far apart. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how did the government sole source a \$250,000 contract, without an open competition, to a company filled with friends, Tory insiders, and supporters' money? Isn't sole-sourcing over \$75,000 ...

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I believe I essentially answered this question yesterday. There were four sole-sourced contracts issued in the moment of the crisis that we all went through last summer. This was an unprecedented circumstance, and in that circumstance the government of Alberta, my predecessor and this government, made the choice to reach out to people who could help buttress the capacities of the government of Alberta. That was Tervita, that was Navigator, that was Norex,

and that was Stantec. These were capacities that helped to ensure that Albertans were safe and looked after in the wake of the floods.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks. Back to the same minister: is it standard operating procedure for this government or this ministry to sign contracts like Navigator's three months after the work has begun?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, I can't speak to specific details with respect to when it was signed, but people were engaged. None of this, the floods last summer, was normal operating procedure for anybody in Alberta. The government responded to meet the needs of Albertans, to ensure that Albertans were safe, that they knew what was going on, that they had access to information, and that they could take steps to protect themselves.

Ms Blakeman: Now, Minister, that's why you have procedures, so that everything can be treated the same.

Back to the same minister: what was the plan? How was the government going to hold this particular company, Navigator, accountable for anything that went wrong, like a privacy breach or a missed deadline, or even hold them to the terms of the contract when the contract wasn't signed until three months later?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, this particular contractor enhanced the work of the Public Affairs Bureau. They provided support in terms of strategic communications advice and research on flood recovery as well as a communications strategy so that Albertans could have trust in the public institutions of this province at a time of great crisis. I can tell you, as Albertans know, that the government of Alberta responded in a very strong way to look after Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I may, I'd like to just take a second and express my gratitude to the Premier for her service to this province and to congratulate my old university roommate, who is going to become the 15th Premier of the province of Alberta, something that I know he's always aspired to.

Severance Payments to Premier's Office Staff

Mr. Mason: Now, Mr. Speaker, on with business. Mr. Deputy Premier, we learn today that a number of senior staff in the Premier's office were let go yesterday. Can he tell us exactly which people were let go and how much the severance is going to be?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I don't have a list of people in front of me, but I think it's understood at any time of transition that most people in a Premier's office are aligned specifically, hired by the Premier to serve that Premier. Anyone in that position normally would tender their resignation at that time or be let go at that time. It's a matter of process, and that will evolve in due course.

With respect to payments, the salaries of all of those people, because of the gold-standard sunshine law that we have, are available to the public, and those contracts are also available to the public.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we've had a look at those contracts, and actually the total severance for the senior people in the Premier's office amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars, perhaps a million dollars or more. Will the Deputy Premier please tell the House what the total bill to the taxpayer is going to be?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that will all evolve in due course. I've had approximately three hours on – well, I'm not actually on the job yet. That starts Sunday, I guess. That will all evolve. There are, obviously, changes when there are transitions in leadership. It's sort of interesting that for most of the year these people have been hounding about too many people on staff and too many salaries on staff and all of those things, and now when there's a change, they want to complain about the cost of people leaving. The fact of the matter is that people come to the service of government, and they know that it's a volatile job. They know that it's a risky job, and they come out from whatever they're doing in the private sector to do it, and . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Deputy Premier is misstating the position. Of course we want the Premier's office to be shrunk down. We want to know how much it's going to cost to get rid of everybody. There are going to be new people put in place by this Deputy Premier, and then a few months later there will be a new Premier. Will he commit that the people that he's going to hire will have short-term contracts with minimal severance conditions?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would think that it would be very apparent to anybody that anybody who came to work specifically for me in a role that I take on as interim Premier would be coming for a very short-term period of time, and they would know that and understand that coming in, and they wouldn't have any expectations of it being longer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mathematics Curriculum

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We have a problem in the education system in Alberta, and it needs to be addressed. You see, tens of thousands of Alberta parents and teachers say that kids are struggling in math right now because of the way Alberta Education insists that it be taught. Now, clearly, the Education minister isn't listening. I'd like to see if anybody else from government is. To the Deputy Premier: there has to be merit in what tens of thousands of Alberta teachers and parents are saying. Do you still insist on replacing the basic, fundamental teachings in mathematics and going to discovery- or inquiry-based learning, or will you listen?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the only person that isn't listening is the hon. member. The Minister of Education has over and over and over again stressed the fact that while we're doing curriculum reform, numeracy and literacy are absolutely fundamental and will continue to be a fundamental part of the curriculum going forward. There's a difference between curriculum and teaching styles. The hon. member should understand that. We have excellent teachers in this province. We have an excellent education system in this province. It's going to get even better. It's the best education system in the English-speaking world, and the

recent PISA tests show that our students actually are good in their numeracy. They are good in their numeracy. It's the problem-solving skills where they had a problem.

Mr. McAllister: I would suggest that many of the math professors in this province disagree.

Given that a university professor called into our tele town hall the other night to tell us that the system is no longer quantifiable so it's difficult to tell if a student is passing or failing and given that the U of A's Ken Porteous has written to the minister saying that this discovery approach has no place at the junior elementary level and that Alberta Education is dumbing down the curriculum, again to the minister: do you support this full on push to inquiry-based discovery learning, or will you listen to Albertans?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member confuses instruction with curriculum. He shows and demonstrates that he doesn't have the knowledge of how a curriculum is developed going forward. I can tell this hon. member that a curriculum is developed by experts in the field, by teachers, who are in the classroom on a day-to-day basis working with our students in this province, achieving the results that students in this province have achieved over time to make Alberta one of the leading education systems in the world, a place where people come from around the world to see what we're doing and how we're doing it so they can emulate it. And this hon. member wants to destroy it.

Mr. McAllister: I would hate to have to take that to the doors.

Given that Mr. Porteous also said the following: I was a member on two different occasions of university committees which met with representatives from Alberta Education to provide input on proposed changes to high school mathematics curriculum, and this was a most frustrating exercise supposedly done under the banner of consultation, but at the end of the day Alberta Education accepted almost none of the suggestions and went ahead and did what they wanted to do anyway, the concern from teachers, parents, and experts has to be real. When will you listen?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should understand that the plural of anecdote is not data. The fact of the matter is that there will be differences of opinion and differences of viewpoints from experts all the time. That's a reality. But what we have is a group of people who consult well, who understand what they're doing. They're called teachers. They work on curriculum, and they develop the best curriculum possible for the students of Alberta. What we know and understand is that the curriculum currently is packed with an awful lot of specific items that students have to learn. What we know is that that has to be unpacked, but the people who are doing it are people who are actually experts in . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. Let's go on.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Kinship Care

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents has been trying to get her three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter into her care. She already has adopted the other siblings. She is an approved adoption foster home, a loving grandmother willing and capable of providing for her grandchildren, yet she is not being considered. She has received nothing but the runaround in trying

to get her granddaughter to be a part of the family. My question is to the Minister of Human Services. Why would the system do such an injustice to these children's lives by not keeping them together?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. Obviously, the member is a strong and powerful advocate for her constituents, and I want to congratulate her on her anniversary.

The member makes a very valid point, Mr. Speaker. Something that I've been saying since I became the Minister of Human Services: my priority is children staying in kinship care, children staying where children are safe and loved. Hopefully, we can find that arrangement within a kinship type of situation. Obviously, I can't discuss the specifics of this particular file.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why, then, did the department tell the foster family that they could adopt the child when they were fully aware that the grandmother wanted her?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I can't discuss the specifics of a file, but what I can say is that there are objectives in the system to help children find permanency. However, as I've said – I've been very clear since day one – as a matter of policy direction the priority must be placing children with safe family members and those that are closest to the children. That's my priority, that's where I want the focus, and that's where we're shifting the system on a daily basis.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad to hear that because the '60s scoop, years ago, was a terrible thing that has happened to aboriginal children. Mr. Minister, could you please indicate to those individuals in my constituency that the '60s scoop will no longer happen?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, what the member says is something that resonates with my heart and many other members' hearts. The fact is that we cannot continue the cycle, the cycle of unfortunate things that happened during residential schools. We have to support families and empower families and help children stay with families and strengthen families within their own home so that children don't have to be moved, Mr. Speaker. That's my goal. That's my priority. That's what we're working towards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Primary Health Care

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The more things change, the more they stay the same. The Premier says one thing, a minister says another, both being far from what either of them had promised. In her resignation speech the Premier made a curious announcement about 80 family care clinics. It's curious because at the same time in budget estimates the Health minister alluded to announcing 24. Meanwhile both the Premier and the minister seemed to have forgotten that the promise was for 140. Minister, what's going on here?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, listening to the hon. member's question, it is perfectly true that the more things change, the more they stay the same. I can't think of a period in time when primary health care has been more thoroughly discussed in this Legislative Assembly. As the hon. member well knows, we began a process

last year with 24 communities across Alberta that have been working diligently to plan family care clinics for their communities. As we've indicated, we have an announcement forthcoming about that group. We have very adequate resources in the budget that's been tabled to add more FCCs.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know this will come as a huge surprise, but there are more unfulfilled promises. Given that members across the aisle were all elected on a platform that included a promise to refund tuition for students qualifying in family or community medicine and given that it's been two years since this government was elected, why hasn't this promise been kept?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure exactly what the hon. member is referring to. I'm not sure that he knows either. What I will tell you is that we continue to work very closely with physicians across the province, working wherever possible to increase family doctors and geriatricians and others that provide very important community-based services. More and more of these physicians are telling us that they want to work in alternative payment models that are not tied to traditional fee-for-service approaches, and we'll continue to work with them to make that realization come true.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a surprise that the minister had not read his own platform, but I'm not done there.

Given that families were told that if they elect a PC government, they could expect a \$500 per child per year tax credit related to the cost of sport and physical activity programs and that, yet again, this promise has still not been delivered, is there any remorse at all from anyone on the front bench for betraying Alberta families yet again?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it makes for great rhetoric, and it sounds good in the House for them, but the drama is not lost on Albertans watching this. We are still within our mandate, within our term. The hon. member might want to stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Livestock Industry Regulations

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing exposes this government's lack of transparency and openness like its treatment of special friends. Now, elk and deer game farmers are pretty connected here in Alberta, and they've asked for a change in regs so special that no one else in North America will go there. Now, few things anger Albertans more than phony consultations, backroom deals, and a sense of entitlement, but that's exactly what the elk and deer game farmers have asked for. To the minister of agriculture: how is it transparent to make major policy changes on behalf of one special group and agree to deny stakeholder and public consultation?

Mr. Olson: The simple answer, Mr. Speaker, is that there has been extensive consultation. She should stay tuned.

Ms Blakeman: No, there hasn't on this particular change.

I'll go to the Minister of Environment and SRD. Now, why would this minister agree with a policy that could expose Alberta

wildlife populations of elk and deer to chronic wasting disease or genetic contamination? I thought his mandate was to protect wildlife, not infect them.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not going to happen. We do a very good job of inspecting the elk farms across this province, and the fact that one or two do escape is not going to cause us any issues. We've had a very good discussion with Agriculture. We had a very good discussion with stakeholders. We've had a very good discussion with people within my ministry that are experts, and we're quite confident that the policy will do okay.

The Speaker: The final supplemental.

2:20

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the minister of agriculture: is the minister denying that there has been agreement between himself and the minister of environment to finalize a domestic cervid industry regulation which would give owners of elk and deer game farms ownership in perpetuity?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, this is a discussion that's been ongoing now for several years. There have obviously been discussions between my department and ESRD. There is no regulation on the table right now, but there certainly is discussion, and it's ongoing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a new day and a chance for this government to rethink their tired Conservative strategies that are dragging them down in the polls, below 19 per cent as far as I can see. Backing off on unnecessary attacks on workers' pensions, which independent analysis shows are well on their way to be fully funded, would be a great start. To the Finance minister: will you show Albertans that were tricked into voting for you in the last election that you're going to turn this around, stop dictating changes, and start negotiating for a fair deal?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting that the hon. member seems to forget that back in July of 2012 was the first time that we started talking to the pension boards about the sustainability and survivability of defined benefit programs. We talked to them then and said that over the period of 2012 to 2013 we wanted them to come forward with some proposals and some other ideas that we could use. We did that. At 2013's year-end in March we suggested that we would put some more things on the table. We did that and opened it up for consultation. In fact, the proposals that we now have on the table are different than the ones we presented because we listened . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that in 20 locations right across this province Albertans today rallied against this government's attack on pensions and given that this government could stop these changes even before they're introduced in the Legislature if they had the will to do so, will this Finance minister commit here today to Albertans to not introduce these sweeping changes to the pensions in this session? Or is it just business as usual here?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, what I will commit to do today is to ensure the survivability and sustainability of defined benefit programs for the benefit of those public-sector employees. The pension promise is about providing a percentage of your income for life. That's not a defined contribution. That's a defined benefit plan. It's a good plan, and we're making it sustainable.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that reducing the benefits of 300,000 public-service workers is a surefire way to inflame whole new generations of Albertans and given that this PC government is actually increasing pensions and severances to managers and other insiders at the very same time, will this government come back to the table to meet with the people who actually own these pensions in the first place and start negotiating and not dictating?

Mr. Horner: First of all, Mr. Speaker, his last comment around management pensions is absolutely false. He should check his facts. He should also check his facts about the benefits that are supposedly being reduced. In fact, for service up to 2015: no reduction. If you're on pension today: no reduction, no change. For service earned beyond the pension guarantee of the percentage of your salary for life: guaranteed. What we're talking about is giving the plan members and the plan payers the ability to manage it and keep it sustainable. We're protecting the defined benefit plan, not getting rid of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Associate Minister's Remarks

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over three decades I worked as a journeymen electrician and a master electrician. Those years were some of the best of my life, working with some of the most skilled and honourable people I've ever met, people who were dedicated to providing service to all Albertans, people who are actually building Alberta. Needless to say, the comments last week from the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety were more than upsetting. To the minister: will you apologize and retract the comments that have upset tradespeople, men and women, across the province?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, this antitrade narrative that I've seen unfolding all week is simply not true. I can tell you right now that my father came over from Holland as an 18-year-old with his carpentry ticket to start a new life. Last time I checked, that was a trade. Certainly, along with that, my mentor and fellow Dutchman, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, is a former welder, and last time I checked, he was still talking to me. Are you still talking to me?

Mr. VanderBurg: I am. Yeah.

Ms Jansen: I can tell you that that narrative is simply not true, but you're enjoying it, so fill your boots.

Mr. Rowe: Really, Mr. Speaker. Well, obviously, we're not going to get an apology from the minister, but has she taken the time to personally apologize to the member in question?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I will never apologize for loyalty. I will also never apologize for my passion and my dedication to the people that I represent. I issued an apology last week on Twitter to anyone that I may have offended with those comments, but I heard from many people in the trades in my constituency over the last few days, and they completely understood the meaning of my

comments. Mr. Speaker, this is irresponsible behaviour designed to whip up the population, and the tradespeople in my constituency know it.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you again for that non apology.

Given that after the associate minister made those comments, she claimed that she didn't mean to attack a group of people, just one individual, and given that her mandate is to find solutions to bullying, is it really appropriate for her to say that if someone feels they're being bullied, they should just pack up and go back to where they belong?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, the comments about bullying I find are interesting, and this, I think . . . [interjection] You should listen. This is a teachable moment.

When we use the term "bullying" . . . [interjections] That's right. When we use the term "bullying" . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to talk here, and I can't even hear myself.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. Tough question; presumably a solid answer if we'd hear the rest of it. Please, don't try and outshout each other.

Ms Jansen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, when you use the term "bullying" to describe what we do in the political arena, you are devaluing the term. There are many people watching today, many families who have contacted me, whose children are the victims of bullying, who say: shame on you for that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Medicine Hat. [interjections] Second call for Calgary-Hawkwood. [interjections] This is the third time I've had to rise. We're losing time. Let's see if we can gain it.

Calgary-Hawkwood.

International Investment

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Globalization has led to a more interconnected world. We need to harness this opportunity by creating a welcoming and supportive environment to attract international investment to do business in Alberta and to bridge our product to the international market. My question is to the hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What program, if any, has your ministry done to reduce the red tape so that international visitors can do business in Alberta?

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for this very serious question. His interest and connection in this area is definitely an asset for our government. Our government has created one of the most attractive and competitive business environments in this country for new or expanding investors anywhere. Our ministry and our international offices actually work directly with interested investors to respond to questions, such as on regulations, to provide them with information and intelligence. Last year we provided connections to about 1,400.

Mr. Luan: To the minister of Treasury Board and Finance: what are the barriers preventing our government from selling bonds to emerging markets such as China?

Mr. Horner: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, there are no legal barriers that are preventing this. The province, in fact, has a global medium-term note program, which does allow it to sell debt in numerous international markets and currencies, including the

Chinese market. The key issue comes down to the cost. Right now the cost of issuing Chinese currency, or renminbi, bonds denominated in that debt would be expensive relative to the Canadian currency or even the U.S. currency. So the goal is to borrow at the lowest possible cost at the appropriate maturity dates for the assets that we're building.

2:30

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that the government of B.C. has successfully sold their bond on the Chinese market, is there anything we can learn from their experience?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we did visit in Hong Kong with the group that did the sale for the B.C. bond issue. What's interesting to note on that issue is that British Columbia did not actually convert the currency to Canadian dollars and bring it back. They actually left it offshore, left it on deposit, if you will, for a brief period of time, earned the interest and paid the interest back on the debt currency, and they'll recover the funds after that. We have looked at doing that, but there's really no purpose to that other than the investment. We don't borrow to invest in bonds and securities. We borrow to invest in infrastructure for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Long-term Care Beds

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The demand for new seniors' care beds keeps growing, but this PC government continues to fall behind in not only the quantity of beds but also the level of care required. A new 80-bed care facility for Medicine Hat received a \$6.4 million building grant in February 2012 with a promise that it would be completed in two years. That would be now, but construction has just started. Can the Minister of Health please tell Albertans how a government-approved project can be allowed to sit idle for two years, putting seniors' quality of life at stake?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member may know from talking to municipal officials in Medicine Hat, the delay in this particular project was caused as a result of drainage issues on the site for the new seniors' care facility. It has taken a period of time for those issues to be resolved. I understand from information I received from the municipality that they have been resolved, and construction can commence.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years is a bit too long, though.

Given that there is an average of 15 seniors occupying acute-care beds in the Medicine Hat hospital because there is nowhere else for them to go and given that the cost of long-term care is approximately \$60 a day versus acute care at over a thousand dollars a day, why does this government continue to waste valuable resources?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should know, the affordable supportive living initiative program, under which this facility is funded, depends upon a successful partnership between the government of Alberta, which is contributing to capital, and the proponent of the project. I would be the first to agree that two years is too long to wait. However, in a very few number of cases due to circumstances beyond our control

municipalities and proponents discover issues that they need to resolve at their level before construction can commence.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that two extra years of having 15 seniors a day in acute-care beds cost taxpayers upwards of \$10 million and given the monumental difference in quality of life for seniors in long-term care versus an acute-care hospital bed, will the Infrastructure minister include financial penalties in future building contracts so those who fail to meet approved construction deadlines are held to account?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, a very interesting remark by the hon. member. In response to his question about fines and penalties, we actually do have provisions in the affordable supportive living initiative program that allow us to cancel projects that do not begin construction within the specified period of time. I'm assuming that on behalf of his constituents he would not want us to make that decision, but I'm sure they'd also be wondering whether, if the hon. member was in my position, any continuing care facility would be built at all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

North-South Trade Corridor

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canamex highway is a project that this government put forward a number of years ago. It's a four-lane highway to connect Mexico through to Alaska. Alberta's part of the project was to be completed in 2007. Could the Minister of Transportation tell me when this project will be completed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the member for the question. This project is important to my constituency as well. I'm pleased to tell you that the work on this vital north-south trade corridor is nearing completion, with work on 20 kilometres of highway 43 in the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, west of Valleyview, currently under way. After that we'll just have over 50 kilometres left west of Grande Prairie to the B.C. border. When completed, a total of \$1 billion will have been invested in this important project and a thousand kilometres.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest areas that is of concern to me, of course, is Grande Prairie, which the hon. minister also shares with me. Their department has purchased the land, but they don't seem to be utilizing it. Could the minister tell me when they plan to utilize it and install the bypass around the city of Grande Prairie, which is part of this corridor?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, we plan to use this land around the city of Grande Prairie for the eventual construction of a bypass around the city called 43X. This project will allow industrial traffic travelling to other parts of the region to avoid moving through the city. This will save industry valuable time and help ease traffic congestion for residents of Grande Prairie. But these

large-scale projects take time to plan and assemble the land for this important growth.

The Speaker: Hon. member, final sup.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister said, they do have the land assembled now, so could I get a commitment to have this placed on a three-year plan?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we hear in this House all the time, just about every community and municipality in this province has transportation projects that they'd like to see added to the three-year plan. Everybody has them. It's a balance. We have to take all these projects and balance them on priorities, needs. That's the job we're doing. We can't do them all at once, but every region considers their project the top priority.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Sherwood Park.

Highway 61

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Cypress-Medicine Hat taking action on highway 61 is just another broken PC promise that will keep getting neglected, no matter how many PC Premiers take their turn in the big chair. The narrow road, steep ditches, and pavement conditions have made this highway treacherous to drive. Will the next leader who walks through the revolving door finally put the needs of these constituents ahead of political motivations and commit to the past government promises made on highway 61?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I could just put replay on here because everybody asks the same question, whether it's members opposite or my own members. As I've said before, there are many requests. If we did every request there was in this House – the opposition knows we don't have the money.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, he can push replay because he's got a litany of broken promises.

Given that highway 61 needs attention to the point where locals are scared, school boards are worried about putting kids on the road, school buses are scared to be there and knowing that some students have to face daily bus rides of an hour and a half, will the government commit to promises made – promises made a decade ago – to improve the safety of this road?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I've said lots in this House. Safety is our number one priority. It's not appropriate for the members to scare the good citizens of Alberta. I guarantee you that there's no bridge or road in this province that isn't safe to drive on. If it was, we'd close it, and we don't plan on closing any roads or bridges.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, it is not appropriate to break your promises.

The local economy has already been badly damaged by PC decisions from the royalty review and the inaction on the sage grouse, not taking action is affecting oil, gas, and agriculture industries as these commodities have to move. Minister, when will this road finally be widened and improved?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess he wants me to hit rewind again. It'll be done when it makes the top of the priority list and fits within our budget for the year. Every project is a priority to each community, but there's only so much money, and

it's a balance to make sure we have safety, market access, and budget all fit in there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Anthony Henday Drive Northeast Portion

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Construction of the northeast Anthony Henday began in the summer of 2012 with the expectation it would be finished in 2016. This project completes the long-awaited Edmonton ring road, connecting the capital region like never before. However, my constituents are concerned that the project will end up late and over budget. They're tired of getting tied up in traffic and wasting valuable time, and so am I, and we want some answers. To the Minister of Transportation. My constituents are impatient and want a definitive answer. Will the northeast Anthony Henday Drive be completed on time?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Transportation minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to this hon. member for the question. She's always working hard on behalf of her constituents. The Anthony Henday road is a great example of how this government is building Alberta for now and for the future. This investment will help support economic, population growth in the capital region for the next 25 years. I'm happy to report that the northeast leg of the Anthony Henday will be completed in 2016 on schedule.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: can you stand in the House and guarantee that this project will not run over budget?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, the good thing about this project is that it's being delivered on our P3 model. The beauty of P3s is that they save both time and money, and with P3 projects we've never had one that hasn't been on budget yet because we sign the contract, and that's all the money they get. So I can assure this member that it won't cost us any more money.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that construction projects often disrupt traffic flow and cause lengthy travel delays, what is being done to ensure that my constituents can move freely into and out of Sherwood Park?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, with large-scale projects like this it's virtually impossible to guarantee that there will be no traffic disruptions, but while traffic may be impacted for a time, the constituents in Sherwood Park can look forward to less congestion with improved traffic flow when the project is completed. In the meantime, Alberta Transportation continues to work with the public – informing them with open houses, travellers' advisories, up-to-date construction info on the 511 Alberta website – so that people are able to plan their routes accordingly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, today: 17 main questions with answers for a total of 102. Good job to all of you. No points of order. The star of the day for no preambles to supplementary questions has to go to Sherwood Park, very brief, succinct. Let us all learn from her, following on the heels of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock a couple

of days ago. And there were others, but I cite those two that stand out.

In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the private members' statements, starting with Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Hon. members, while we wait for private members' statements, do we have unanimous consent to revert to introductions briefly?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Mr. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some excellent students and their professors from The King's University College here in Edmonton. Students are visiting the Legislature as part of their class in which they study politics, history, and economics. That class is called engaging the world: faith in public life. The King's University College is a great partner in our Campus Alberta system. With about 700 students from across Canada and 16 other countries King's offers undergraduate education through a Christian perspective. Postsecondary education plays a significant role in our building Alberta plan. It's important that students are included when we discuss the future direction of Campus Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce the following individuals, who are in the members' gallery, and ask them to stand when I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Tauffic Adams; Jacob Aldrich; Noah Bradley; Zachary DeJong; Reagen Henderson; Marie Page; Martin Vriend; Dr. Michael DeMoor, assistant professor of social philosophy; and Dr. Gerda Kits, assistant professor of economics. I'd like them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, let us continue with private members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Northern Leaders' Summit

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the very successful northern leaders' summit held on March 14, 2014, in Athabasca. The northern leaders' summit brought together elected officials for a day of conversation, leading to the identification of priorities for the development of Alberta's north. I was pleased to share that day with municipal, First Nations, and Métis leaders from across Alberta's vast north. It's important to recognize the significant contribution of the many ministers of this government to this successful event. Northern elected officials were so pleased to have ministers sit down with them to hear the concerns of northerners and to see their willingness to work together to progress northern Alberta and indeed all of this great province.

We were delighted that the Premier was able to join us. The Premier sent a clear message that this government is committed to supporting development in northern Alberta and respecting the concerns of those who live next door to that development.

Mr. Speaker, this gathering of northern leaders was unprecedented. Issues were brought forward and priorities were identified through real and authentic conversation. Albertans know and understand that the rich resources in northern regions of this province are critical to our present and future prosperity. The northern leaders' summit was an important recognition of the role northern Alberta and its citizens play in Alberta's prosperity.

At the conclusion of the day a hundred per cent of the delegates voted to convene another northern leaders' summit in 2015, truly a ringing endorsement.

I want to thank the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake, who chairs the Northern Alberta Development Council, for their leadership in bringing attention to Alberta's north.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Little Bow.

Trade with India

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise today to speak about the Premier's recent trade mission to India. Our Premier, with a group of Alberta's representatives, extended Alberta's trade to one of the world's largest markets. Alberta now has strong trade ties with two Indian provinces. Our government is strengthening our future with continued economic growth in new Asian markets. I was honoured to be part of the signing of the agreement and the opening of the New Delhi-Alberta office with the Premier and colleagues.

I recognize the value that India has in the global marketplace. Since the agreement was signed, my contacts in the government of Punjab are as eager to move forward as we are. We all agree that this memorandum of understanding will be a huge benefit for the two states of India, Punjab and Meghalaya, and our beautiful province.

Our government worked hard to promote trade with India. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased for the forward thinking of our government and this trade mission to diversify markets to the benefit of Alberta and Canada. The future economic growth that Alberta will experience will prove that this is an investment for all Albertans. We need to continue to move forward quickly to promote oil, gas, and agriculture to new Asian markets. Both India and Alberta will profit now and for a very long time to come.

God bless our province of Alberta, and God bless Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Bridges in Rural Areas

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to talk about rural Alberta. This government has its building Alberta plan. Well, this plan seems to have forgotten a little place called rural Alberta.

We have a lot of problems with their strategic infrastructure program, and one of the key parts to that is the building bridges file. All the bridges are run by the municipalities, and the bridge funding was cut last year. The AAMD and C has talked about how they need at least \$75 million a year for the next 10 years to keep these bridges going. Today the hon. Minister of Transportation talked about the Canamex highway, with a billion dollars pumped into that. That's great, but if you cannot get your product to the main highways because a bridge is being banned or shut down, that basically renders this whole province useless for getting any of their products moved around. This province really needs to sit

down and remember where the products come from and where they need to be moved from.

We talked about fearmongering there on the safety side when one of the members, I believe Cypress-Medicine Hat, brought up things. It is a problem. One of the bridges in Lethbridge county has been banned to five tonnes. Mr. Speaker, at five tonnes a fire truck cannot drive across there with a load on it. If it does and it falls through, who's at fault? This is a safety concern for my constituents and a lot of the constituents in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in my riding due to irrigation there are over 750 bridge files. That's a lot of bridges, that basically account for about 12 per cent of the bridges in this province. If we do not figure out how to get the money back into this program, we're going to have a lot of people sitting here wondering how they're going to get around to get to see all the signs in this province about building Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I was sent here to represent the constituents of Little Bow and as a voice for rural Alberta. Right now I'm voicing that we need to get our bridges back up so people can get around this province and get trade back to where it should be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo had a spot and has ceded it, so we will move on.

2:50

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a petition with over 11,000 signatures collected through the campaign No Drilling Lethbridge from the citizens of Lethbridge and area who are very concerned about the possibility of urban drilling close to residential areas and schools in the city.

Thank you very much.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise to table five copies of the Alberta Economic Development Authority's annual activity report. AEDA has been one of the government's most dependable, enduring, and trusted partners for the past two decades. AEDA has identified strategic solutions to a range of economic challenges such as job creation, skills and education, productivity, competitiveness, market access.

The annual report is a great celebration of their work and contains information on some of the latest studies and reports commissioned by AEDA. The studies include water reuse, congestion management, opportunities in Alberta's innovation system, and the 2013 Report on Competitiveness. I would encourage all members to get a copy and read this report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or someone on behalf of, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 50 of the more than 4,000 postcards that our office received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to post-secondary education in Alberta.

I also have the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to the Finance minister, Doug Horner, by one of his constituents,

Paulina Ross, lamenting the unnecessary meddling in the public-sector pension plans.

Finally, I have five copies of a document that we were distributing as Alberta New Democrats here today talking about pensions and problems with public pensions.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you know that we are not to refer to the first or last names of people who are elected here. I know you know that. I see that you're sincerely sorry, so we'll move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of an e-mail actually directed to the Health minister but copied to me. This is from a constituent, Nicholas Ternes, and he points out that the 2011 campaign Plenty of Syph, which was an STI testing campaign, resulted in a 17 per cent increase in public interest and patients seeking this but no additional staffing there, so people are being regularly turned away. His point is that now that we've got people understanding they need to get tested for STIs, it's not helping us if they go there and get turned away, that we'd likely create far more expensive consequences.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an article I referenced yesterday in my member's statement. The article is from the March 14, 2014, *Calgary Herald* and is titled Brandon and Gereluk: Let's Strengthen Education through Evidence, Not Fads. It was written by Jim Brandon and Dianne Gereluk.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to table letters from constituents. I have the requisite copies. This is from John Emmons and Maria Farmer, who have the apparent failure of the Workers' Compensation Board to recognize their claims going forward. I wish to table that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

No rulings on points of order are required, so we can move on.

Statement by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day Program

The Speaker: I'd like to make a brief statement if I could for you regarding the MLA for a Day program. Fellow members, as you know, the Legislative Assembly is again hosting Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day on Monday, May 5, and Tuesday, May 6. This is a great opportunity for high school students from all over the province, from all of your constituencies, actually, and mine, to learn about what we do here, how we do it, and so on and to gain a better understanding of how our parliamentary democracy functions, meet other young people who are equally interested, and in general to promote good citizenship and participation. These students will even debate a resolution right here in the very Chamber in which we sit. I hope they will have a chance to meet all of you throughout the course of the program.

Please, can you let your high schools know that this program is fully supported by the Legislative Assembly Office, with the sponsorship of the Royal Canadian Legion, Alberta-Northwest Territories Command, and that means there is no cost to the students whatsoever. None. The LAO, visitor services, will take care of all of those arrangements, and the deadline for registration is March 31.

Of course, we're trying to generate again as much interest as we did last year, when we had a record number turnout. Information packages and registration forms have already been sent to you, but they are also available on the Assembly website at www.assembly.ab.ca. I'd be most obliged to all of you to support this program and encourage a student or two to submit their names from your area. Your personal involvement is extremely helpful, and it is most encouraging to help students participate from your constituency. Ultimately, we're all looking for the same thing, and that is success in connecting with our young people, encouraging them perhaps to even follow in our footsteps.

Thank you for whatever you can do to help promote this important program, MLA student for a day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Estate Administration Act

[Adjourned debate March 13: Ms Kubinec]

Ms Kubinec: It is my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act.

The Speaker: I believe you already moved it, hon. member, or someone did. You have 12 minutes to finish your speech, though.

Ms Kubinec: Actually, you know, I'm just going to talk briefly about it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sure.

Ms Kubinec: As a result of the roles and responsibilities of personal representatives it will be easier to understand, and beneficiaries can be more assured that the wishes of the deceased are being followed.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident this legislation will benefit Albertans. Several of the changes contained in the bill were motivated by recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and both round-tables and online consultations were conducted with Alberta's estate practitioners.

With that, I would like to close debate.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have others who may still wish to speak here. Did you truly mean to conclude it?

Ms Kubinec: My apologies.

The Speaker: I don't think you did, because you were moving third reading far earlier.

Ms Kubinec: My apologies.

The Speaker: Are there others? Edmonton-Centre, you wish to join in the debate?

Ms Blakeman: I do. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: So can we ask Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to just recant that last statement?

Ms Kubinec: I recant.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much to the sponsor of the bill. Again, I want to particularly recognize the people that were involved in the development of this new estate act, which is going to replace – excuse me while I double-check this. I think we're repealing two other bills as a result of this, the previous estates act and one other one. It's not going to come to me in a quick second here.

The other thing of interest in all of this is that a minor's interest, not a person with a shovel but a person under 18, has been, for the most part, removed from this act, but it's being dealt with somewhere else, and I think that's quite appropriate.

I do want to recognize the various legal minds that were involved in this. I think they have done an exceptional job in this, particularly given lawyers' proclivities to make the language more dense and harder to follow. They've done a very nice job working against their lawyerly instinct.

I also want to recognize the staff from the Department of Justice and Solicitor General because I know they had a big hand in this and have been chugging along with this legislation for some time. I really am quite pleased with this legislation, and I'm very glad to see it in place. Hopefully, I will not have to take advantage of the clear writing and instructions to laypeople in any quick timeline, but I'll be much happier working with this legislation than with what we had previously when that day and time comes for me to act as executor.

Once again, thank you to everyone that was involved with this. I've not had any negative feedback on the bill. My congratulations to everyone, and I am happy to support this bill in third reading.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? None.

Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, now should you wish to conclude debate, it is your opportunity to do so.

3:00

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a real pleasure to have the ability to carry this bill through. I think it's important to Albertans.

With that, I would adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock has moved third reading of Bill 4, the Estate Administration Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister of reconstruction.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014.

The existing legislation protects Albertans buying a new home. It raises the overall quality of construction and provides Albertans with the strongest new-home warranty protection in Canada. The home warranty legislation and supporting regulations came into effect February 1, 2014, and have been working very well.

Sometimes when new legislation is introduced, there are minor changes needed. That's what these amendments to the New Home Buyer Protection Act are about. The foundation principles in the act, including its warranty protection requirements, remain. The proposed amendments result from extensive stakeholder consultations while preparing the regulations in 2013. Certain sections in the act were identified as areas for clarification and technical changes in the way some provisions are implemented. Bill 6 proposes technical and clarifying amendments.

In addition, Bill 6 adopts several rules already in place in the regulations. While these regulations are working well, adopting them into the act provides a more permanent solution. It clarifies existing policies; for example, the 10-year period that a new home is subject to in the act is currently called the purchase period. In Alberta the date buyers sign papers to purchase a home can be long before warranty coverage begins. Bill 6 will rename the 10-year period to be the protection period. To clarify what it is about: how long a home is protected by the act.

It also clarifies the commencement of the protection period for condominium conversions of apartments built under an insurance exemption. If a conversion occurs during the apartment's protection period, each condominium unit's protection period is determined individually. Each protection period is deemed to have begun on the date of the unit's first rental occupancy.

Bill 6 also clarifies that administrative penalties may be issued on a per-home basis. It proposes that when an administrative penalty is appealed, the penalty recipient must pay it or post an irrevocable letter of credit similar to a cheque that can't be cancelled. The letter of credit will be returned in the event of a successful appeal but discourages filing an appeal just to delay payment.

One of Bill 6's technical amendments provides that the first day of occupancy starts the protection period for all homes. Currently where home purchases do not involve a land titles transfer, the day the owner moves in is the day the warranty starts if it has not started already. Builders rarely let owners move into new homes without buying them first. However, from time to time owners move into new homes before land titles registrations go through. Whenever this happens, the warranty coverage will begin on the day the owner moves in if warranty coverage has not been started already.

Bill 6 proposes a new provision called a rental use designation, part of a land titles based conditional home warranty insurance exemption for apartment buildings. A provision in the regulations allows apartment builders and owners to have apartments without home warranty insurance provided the building is owned by one person who does not sell units individually, convert the building into condominiums, or subdivide the building in separate titles. Mr. Speaker, this exemption is not available for condominium buildings.

Mr. Speaker, under Bill 6 exempt apartments must have a rental use designation registered on their land title. The caveat will warn potential buyers that the apartment building has no insurance. The land titles registration is similar to an existing provision in the act on restrictive covenants; however, Bill 6 provides more detail on how the land titles registration works, which is something stakeholders wanted to clarify. The bill's provisions describe how the caveat will be registered, maintained on title, and discharged. In particular, discharge of the caveat will be allowed only through

application to the new-home buyer protection office. Where there are disputes under this exemption, the regulation-making powers under the act allow for grounds for appeal to the New Home Buyer Protection Board to be put in place.

Additionally, Bill 6 adopts some rules contained in the regulations to make them more permanent. Some amendments give the registrar of the new-home buyer protection office and the New Home Buyer Protection Board tools to handle a higher volume of work efficiently. Minor amendments to the appeals process also include allowing the board to make rules of procedure and making all appeals to the board due within 30 days.

Mr. Speaker, I would move second reading of Bill 6.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I assume you're moving it on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is that correct?

Mr. Weadick: That's correct, and I would like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: So it is correct that you did move it on behalf of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and that you have moved to adjourn debate.

Hon. members, the motion for adjournment of debate on this particular bill is up.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Kubinec moved, seconded by Mr. McDonald, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

12. Mr. Olson moved on behalf of Ms Redford:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Speaker: This motion is debatable. Are there any others who wish to participate?

If not, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 on Monday, April 7.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:08 p.m. to Monday, April 7, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to March 20, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft.), 146-54 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 184-87 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 217-18 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 226-28 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2014; SA 2014 cS-2.5]

2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 84 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 154-56 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187-88 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c2]

3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)

First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143-45 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c3]

4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 145-46 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 184 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 191-93 (Mar. 11, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 229 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 250 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft.), 330 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 119 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 174 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 188-90 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 218-20 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 228-29 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 230 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c1]

6 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Hughes)

First Reading -- 300 (Mar. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- (Mar. 20, 2014 aft., adjourned)

201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-34 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship)

202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 264-79 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., defeated on division)

203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act (Jablonski)

First Reading -- 249 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., passed)

204 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014 (Barnes)

First Reading -- 263-64 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, April 7, 2014

Issue 13

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 7, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. O gracious God, help us in our daily duties and guide us with Your wisdom. Remind us to not be judgmental of others, and help us to be understanding of those who may differ from us in cause and purpose. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem now and remain standing after it's over for an additional tribute.

Mr. Robert Clark, will you lead us, please?

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Mr. Jonathan Joseph Lord December 29, 1956, to March 26, 2014

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. Today we honour and respect Mr. Jonathan Joseph Lord.

Mr. Jon Lord served this Assembly as the Member for Calgary-Currie for one term, from 2001 to 2004. Mr. Lord came from a background of enterprising action and spirit. He was an entrepreneur who carved out his future first through business and community and then as a two-term alderman for the city of Calgary from 1995 to 2001.

As a Member of this Legislative Assembly Mr. Lord served on numerous committees. In the House he was a vocal proponent of the disadvantaged, a promoter of energy efficiency, and a champion for small business. He laboured tirelessly on behalf of his constituents and his family, and he never stopped contributing to the betterment of his community. Many of us had the honour of serving with him. That means something very special to each of us.

In a moment of silent prayer let us bow our heads and remember Mr. Jon Lord as we may have known him. O Lord, grant unto him eternal rest, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is gratitude that we pay to members of the families who share the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome some very special members of the Lord family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. I will introduce them one at a time. Perhaps they could signal their presence to us with a hand wave, and then we can applaud and thank them all for having been part of Jon's life and, in turn, part of our history: Jon's partner, Sheryl Guillaume, of Calgary; Jon's youngest daughter, Jessica Eren, of Calgary; Jon's son-in-law Deniz Eren of Calgary; Jon's grandson Altan Eren of Calgary; Jon's sister Judy Brown of Edmonton; Jon's brother Dennis Brown of Edmonton; and

Sheryl's daughter-in-law, Tanya Morey, of Calgary. Unfortunately, Jon's other daughters – Mandy, Michelle, and Katie – were not able to be with us here today, but our thoughts and prayers are also with them.

To the Lord family we say thank you, and now we pay our respects through our applause for Mr. Jon Lord. [applause]

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Welcome to the Premier

The Speaker: Hon. members, I beg your indulgence just before we go on with the introduction of visitors to make a brief statement. In this respect I would ask that you please hold any applause that you might wish to offer until I have concluded my comments.

I want to take a moment to officially welcome Alberta's 15th Premier, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. First elected to this Assembly in 1997, the hon. member has served as Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Health and Wellness, Minister of Education, Minister of Human Services, and is currently serving as Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. He has also held the role of Government House Leader or Deputy Government House Leader in 16 out of the 17 years that he has served in this Assembly.

On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I welcome the first Premier of Alberta to be born in the Northwest Territories. He is now Alberta's 15th Premier. Please join me in welcoming the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, Mr. Premier. [Standing ovation]

On that note, I'd ask the hon. Premier to make his first introduction.

1:40

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for those kind remarks and to all of my colleagues in the House for the warmth that we will have for at least the next minute in this role.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of leaders from our First Nations and Métis communities that are with us here today. They're sitting in your gallery, and I'd ask that they stand as I read their names. From the Truth and Reconciliation Commission we have Commissioner Marie Wilson; Education Day co-ordinator Charlene Bearhead; president of the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, Audrey Poitras; and the Assembly of First Nations regional vice-chief, Cameron Alexis. In a few moments I'll be speaking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events that took place recently here in Edmonton. I'm grateful for our guests' attendance here today and, through them, for all the work that was done by the leadership of the commission and by the commissioners and by all those who acted on their behalf to ensure that we had the event that we had to really discuss an issue of prime importance to Albertans and Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members to join me in thanking these dedicated individuals and the individuals they represent for the countless hours of work that they do for our community and for our people. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the House. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Pisan Manawapat, who is the ambassador of Thailand. Welcome also to Mr. Narong Boonsatheanwong, minister-counsellor from the Royal Thai Embassy in Ottawa, and Mr. Yothin Tongpenyai, president of Thailand's petroleum exploration and production company in Canada. Our province is home to a very active community of more than 1,000 Albertans of Thai descent. Ambassador Manawapat's visit is a great opportunity for us to tell Alberta's story as well as explore new areas of co-operation in a variety of sectors. Our esteemed guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'd now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the notes with me, but I believe I'm introducing a group from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, the careers-in-training program from NorQuest College, I think. Forgive me if I'm mumbling my way through your introduction. I know that you students always work really hard and have lots to bring forward. If you're with us in either gallery, please rise so that we may give you an appropriate welcome.

The Speaker: Your second introduction, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. It's very kind of you to allow me to do a second introduction. Again, I can't see him, but I am sure that Mickey Wilson is with us in one of the two galleries. I've known Mickey for a very long time. We have marched together and sang and danced together a little bit and stood watch and supported each other through a lot. I was at his wedding. He is now the executive director of the Pride Centre. He's here today to witness the passage – she said hopefully – of my colleague's Motion 503, which is to establish gay-straight alliances in schools if students so wish. Mickey, I hope you're with us now. There he is. Please rise and accept our warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 bright young grade 6 students from my wife Janice's alma mater, Forest Heights elementary school, who are here today. These students will be attending School at the Legislature this week, and it's my hope that they gain a positive and constructive understanding of the Legislature. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Marion Fritz, and a volunteer from Kassel, Germany, Christin Noll. I would now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is 33 bright and energetic students

from Delton elementary school. They are accompanied by Mr. Rodney Corkum and Mrs. Dao Haddad, their teachers. I would like to welcome them to the Assembly and ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The second introduction, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you two new members of our caucus staff. Sean Steels is a sessional communications officer. He attended the Grant MacEwan public relations program and most recently worked as a co-ordinator with the Works Art & Design Festival here in Edmonton.

Chris Fulmer has recently joined us as a sessional research assistant. Chris has a bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Alberta. He's contributed to numerous political campaigns and is very excited to be working on the front lines helping to keep the government accountable and working towards a better and more inclusive Alberta.

I would now like to ask Chris and Sean to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to everyone here in the Assembly 58 members of St. Edmund school. They are accompanied by Miss Dawn Miskew, Ms Christina Fielden, and Ms Karen Butt. St. Edmund school has the athletic program. I was just there recently, and I'm very pleased to have them here to receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, your guests will arrive later, so let us move on, then, to the Premier, who has an introduction.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of very dedicated and passionate student leaders. The Council of Alberta University Students now represents more than 100,000 students. CAUS recently added the student associations from Mount Royal University and from MacEwan University to its membership. For the next four days these leaders will be in the Legislature discussing key issues with a number of MLAs. This is their advocacy week. Within just a few minutes of meeting this group, you will realize that Alberta's future is incredibly bright thanks to the talented and dedicated young men and women who make up the organization.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you from the University of Alberta Adam Woods, Petros Kusmu, Navneet Khinda, and William Lau; from the University of Calgary Raphael Jacob, Jarett Henry, and Levi Nilson; from the University of Lethbridge Shuna Talbot and Sean Glydon; from Mount Royal University Missy Chareka and Mr. Erik Queenan; from MacEwan Cam McCoy, Ryan Roth, and Ray Khan; and, last but not least, the council's support staff, Beverly Eastham. These students have been advocating on behalf of students from the universities across this province. They do incredible work. Some of them are now retiring – their terms are up – and others are just coming into their terms. I'd ask the House to thank them for the work done, thank them for the work they will do, and give them the incredible warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Allison Sweeney and Dr. John Webb, who specialize in rural family medicine and genetic medicine, respectively. They are here today with the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta, or PARA, to advocate for increased vaccinations for all Albertans. Vaccination is one of the single most effective ways a person can protect their health, that of their family, their workplace, and their community. I would ask all members of the Assembly to please help PARA in accomplishing this important public health goal by resourcing public health and vaccination programs. I would ask Dr. Sweeney and Dr. Webb to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the clock suggests that we ought to be moving to question period, but I have a request from the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request unanimous consent to waive 7(1.1) and delay Oral Question Period until the ministerial statement and all replies are concluded.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has requested that we waive Standing Order 7(1.1) so that question period would begin after Ministerial Statements is completed. It's my understanding that the opposition members have been apprised of the ministerial statement that may be forthcoming, and so, too, have private or independent members.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We have another eight or nine introductions. Do you wish to do those first, hon. members? We could finish those up? Okay. Well, let's finish those up, then, and please be quick so we can move on with Ministerial Statements.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Red Deer-North.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my dear friend Mr. Kashmir Gill. Mr. Kashmir Gill is a professional engineer who works as the regional director of the National Research Council of Canada's industrial research assistance program. This program provides technical and business innovation services to mid-sized Canadian companies. Mr. Gill is a very active community volunteer in the community at large. One of his outstanding achievements is to raise money for projects like the Guru Nanak Dev healing garden centre at the University of Alberta hospital. I will ask Mr. Gill to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a number of persons who are here to support Bill 203 in second reading. They are Dr. Gordon Hensel, the registrar for the Alberta College of Optometrists; Bettylyn Baker, a teacher who is very concerned about children with visual impediments to learning; Diane Bergeron, who is the CNIB national director, government relations and advocacy; Lui Greco, who is with the CNIB – he's the Alberta-Northwest Territories director, government relations and advocacy – John McDonald from the CNIB, the Alberta-Northwest

Territories executive director and regional vice-president; Megan Kompf, the CNIB Alberta-Northwest Territories regional manager; Julia Roy from the Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired; Marc Workman, CNIB national manager for consumer advocacy; and Jung-Suk Ryu, manager, communications, CNIB Alberta and Northwest Territories. They are seated in the members' gallery. They're all here to support Bill 203 and to hear second reading. I would ask them all to rise now to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Nicholas Burris. Nick is a resident of the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency and has a very keen interest in global politics. He has recently moved to Lacombe from Melbourne, Australia, looking to retrace his father's roots. Nick, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to, in fact, all members of this Assembly Dr. Kris Wells of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. Dr. Wells is a tremendous advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer youth in this province and throughout the country. I'm proud to have him as my guest on the day we debate a motion and, hopefully, pass that motion designed to continue the good work of making things better for LGBTQ kids today. I would ask Kris to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Health Day, and April 6 to 12 is Dental Hygienist Week. In recognition of this, we have some very special guests from the college of dental hygienists and the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta. Dental hygienists play a crucial role in promoting preventative health measures and wellness, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them sincerely for all of their hard work and dedication. Not everyone can do what they do.

PARA is here for the annual resident physicians in the Legislature day. Of course, they are continuing to build relationships with their elected representatives, as discussed, and also discussing many items of health policy. I had the opportunity to meet with all of the intelligent, enthusiastic members of PARA earlier today, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that with these physicians leading our health care system, I know our medical future is in great hands.

At this point I would like to ask not only Dr. Allison Sweeney, PARA vice-president of leadership and education, but also Ms Gerry Cool, past president of the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta and the Alberta director for the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you already did your introduction, or do you have a third introduction? You're done? Thank you.

Edmonton-Meadowlark, you're finished with your introductions, and, Edmonton-Centre, you've completed yours as well. Is that correct? It's just that I have you listed further here.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Premier and Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Event

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today to recognize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission having held its seventh and final national event in the city of Edmonton from March 27 to 30. Four years ago the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held its first national event in the city of Winnipeg, the city with then the largest urban aboriginal population in the country. It was fitting that the final national event should take place here as Edmonton has the second-highest aboriginal population in the country and growing.

Indian residential schools operated in our country for 130 years, and approximately 150,000 children attended those schools. In Alberta there were 25 Indian residential schools, the most in any province or territory, and today there are 12,000 survivors in Alberta, the second-highest number in Canada. Over the four days of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathering over 400 residential school survivors related their experiences at those schools and the profound impact on the lives of themselves, their families, and their communities. Parental, family, and cultural breakdown led to profound emotional and spiritual consequences for generations of children.

Over the four days that I was able to attend, I was touched to hear the experiences of the survivors and am still in awe of the courage they displayed by sharing such personal experiences. It was heartwarming to be there with the record number of Albertans and western Canadians in attendance at the commission gathering. I was so pleased also to see so many community leaders attending. I commend Alberta ministers and MLAs who attended the national event, and I would specifically reference the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who was an honorary listener during the event. We were all there to learn and to listen, to understand this part of our history better. I'd also like to thank Mayor Naheed Nenshi of Calgary and Mayor Don Iveson of Edmonton as well as the mayor of Wetaskiwin, Bill Elliot, for providing a declaration of a year of reconciliation. We look forward to working with them as to how that year of reconciliation can make a difference in our relationships and our results.

Part of the work of the commission, Mr. Speaker, is to help people understand the history of Indian residential schools and to engage Canadians in conversations and expressions of reconciliation about those schools and about the people who were affected. The history of Indian residential schools is not solely an aboriginal history. It is a shared history. It is our history.

It was a proud moment when the Minister of Aboriginal Relations announced to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission how Alberta will move forward through our expression of reconciliation. The Minister of Education is leading some bold work for the provincial kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum to include enhanced mandatory content for all Alberta students on the significance of residential schools and treaties. The government of Alberta commits to continuing work on professional development so that teachers learn about the history and legacy of the residential schools and First

Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and are better prepared to meet the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and youth.

2:00

The public national events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may have concluded, but the work, Mr. Speaker, continues. We have an opportunity to write a new chapter in our relationship with aboriginal people, a chapter with a richer and fuller understanding of their experiences and the contributions that aboriginal people make to our province. Indeed, the history of aboriginal people in Alberta is our history. It's an essential part of our history, and the future of aboriginal people in this province is our future. Alberta will continue to build its relationship with aboriginal people to ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people have every advantage to benefit from Alberta's tremendous economy and great quality of life. Aboriginal people in Alberta deserve to have the same socioeconomic status as all other Albertans, and we are committed to that happening.

The Speaker: Sorry; Edmonton-Centre?

Ms Blakeman: I was rising to ask for the unanimous consent of the members of the Assembly to allow the other opposition leaders and individual members to speak after the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a request has been put forward. It requires unanimous consent for the leaders of the third and fourth parties to offer their remarks on this subject right after the Official Opposition House Leader has spoken.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us move on in the meantime with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for her remarks.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Premier, for your statement.

The final national Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Edmonton saw 3,243 survivors registered, 402 statements gathered, and 30,120 live video streams broadcast to 36 countries over the course of four days. This paramount event helped to forge the path towards the integral process of healing and reconciliation for the victims of the residential school tragedy.

Throughout the weekend many survivors were given the opportunity to share their stories. I was particularly moved by the story of Theodore Fontaine of Winnipeg. Theodore entered residential school in 1948 and spent more than 12 years there. He would later write a book about his experiences. In his words, quote, this was the biggest mistake that Canada ever made; whatever you've heard is incredibly true and is just a fraction of what happened. Unquote. Theodore said that he endured mental, spiritual, and sexual abuse, having been raped repeatedly at a young age. He went through several phases of trauma, confrontation, and healing in his life. Just one month ago he began reliving the abuses. A terrifying nightmare left him lying paralyzed in bed. He said: I always think I'm on my way to reconciliation and a better way of life, but it stays with you.

He went on to share about how he reached out to one of the individuals who molested him in an attempt to bring closure, and the person claimed he didn't remember him. Theodore told him, quote: "I said, 'I'm sorry because for the last 60 years I've hated you and wanted to kill you.' Can you imagine saying that to another human being? That came from me, but it wasn't me speaking. It was the seven-, eight-, and nine-year-old boy getting out whatever was still bothering him after 60-some years."

Unquote. His abuser continued to deny that anything had happened, and Theodore resolved to confront him again at a later date. Within a month he had another face-to-face meeting with him, and at the end as they were wrapping up the meeting, his abuser said: by the way, Theodore, thank you very much for not mentioning my name in your book. Mr. Speaker, there are no words.

A recent study revealed that only 50 per cent of Canadians are aware of the residential school system. One of the long-term goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to ensure that mainstream society is educated on this part of Canada's history as it is a key component of the healing and reconciliation process.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission asserts and we embrace the belief that the truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation. It is my hope that devastating stories like Theodore's are not forgotten and will get us all one step closer to healing once and for all.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus I am very thankful and feel honoured to live on Treaty 6 lands.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and hear the stories and feel the pain shared by those survivors. The government of Canada guaranteed in return for peace and control of the land to provide for basic needs and the rights of the First Nations people. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Indian Act meant ripping children from their families at a young age, denying them their language and cultural practices, and in many cases physically abusing them and emotionally and mentally abusing them in many of the residential schools across the country. Absent parenting predictably led to absent skills for parenting in subsequent generations and mental health issues and addictions and poverty for many of our First Nations brothers and sisters.

Mr. Speaker, I've spent the majority of my life on the front lines in an inner-city hospital seeing the First Nations of our country overrepresented in the homeless population, overrepresented in the prison system, overrepresented in the human suffering that exists today in our society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was absolutely essential to account for something that has been a horrendous black mark on our society as a civil society in Canada and right here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this is only the beginning. Healing only begins with this, but what we need to do is follow up healing with hope, with a major investment into education, into health care, into really dealing with the real issues of inequality and poverty that still exist today: affordable housing, potable water. We've seen the missing and murdered women, hundreds of them across the country. That has to be atoned for. We have seen the deaths of 741 children right here in Alberta, one child a week dying in government care, 70 per cent of them First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.

These problems, Mr. Speaker, still exist today in the Alberta that we live in. I call on all members of the Assembly along with our Alberta Liberal caucus to not only support the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – and I thank the commission members and all those across the country and the federal leaders for being a part of this. But, my dear friends, we have so much more work to do. As the new Premier said, their

problem is our problem, and the future of the First Nations community is our future. It's a shared humanity and a shared future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a critical step in moving towards healing, and the Alberta NDP was thankful to attend the final national event in Edmonton. This event was the culmination of several years of work that began with a historic apology on behalf of the people of Canada in the Parliament in 2008. I am proud of the important role that Jack Layton played in bringing that about.

The powerful testimonies of survivors that were shared over the four-day event here in Edmonton were just a glimpse of the damage that residential schools have caused to indigenous cultures and communities. We applaud the courageous women and men who shared their testimony at the event, and we hope that they are finding healing. But the healing does not end with the adjournment of the commission, Mr. Speaker. There's much more that we need to do.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, we've heard today that this government will be implementing an enhanced curriculum on residential schools. We sincerely hope that this is a promise that will be kept. While teaching this history is vital, we must do more to remove barriers for indigenous people. We need to open doors for greater opportunity for indigenous students, and we could start by keeping the promise made for aboriginal bursaries for postsecondary education. We could strengthen our consultation process so that indigenous people are true partners in future resource development. We need to do more to address the gross inequality in health and social spending that occurs on reserves and to expand resources dedicated to improving educational outcomes for indigenous children.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for action. Truth and reconciliation must be an ongoing process, and we urge this government to not close the book on this sad history but to continue to push for further healing, inclusiveness, and the removal of inequalities for all indigenous Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon members, I have received a written request to participate in the statements at this time from Calgary-Foothills as an independent member of the Assembly. If anyone is in objection to granting unanimous consent to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, would you please express your objection now?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. I'd like to join my colleagues in the recognition of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission over the last month. This historic tragedy is one that we need to learn from and respect the incredible hardships that these people faced not only as a group but individually.

The truth and reconciliation approach is a form of restorative justice, aiming to heal the relationships between offenders, victims, and the community in which these tragedies took place. Those involved in truth and reconciliation commissions seek to

uncover facts and distinguish truth from lies. The process allows for acknowledgement, public mourning, forgiveness, and healing.

It is important to remember that Alberta is comprised of many diverse groups, and the provincial kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum's recognition of the study of residential schools and treaties is a vital part of what makes our province so strong.

Having had the incredible honour of being the past Minister of Aboriginal Relations, I have heard first-hand how important the learning of the history and legacy of all of Alberta's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples is to these groups. I am convinced that knowledge of past successes and failures will greatly increase our ongoing ability to recognize and honour the contributions by aboriginal peoples to all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have received two final written requests here for participation. Again, it requires unanimous consent. One is from the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, and the other is from the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I'll ask one question. If anyone objects to giving unanimous consent to these two individuals expressing their brief comments on this matter, would you please express so now?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the darkest moments of our history is the history that has affected many individuals like Theodore, like my father, like my mother, and like myself but also many nations, and its effect has been felt and will continue to be felt for many generations. As a result, we have experienced many ills in my community, ills that we've had to live with.

Mr. Speaker, I was a small girl, a tiny girl. When I was born, I weighed two pounds. When I went to school, I was the smallest girl, and I had to go to residential school. Being small is really not as much of an advantage as overweight people think it's an advantage. It was not an advantage. It was not a good time. The nuns were very cruel. They used to pick on me because I was so tiny. Many times I was hit by a ruler; it was always across the back. I do have scars from that. But I did get through it. It was no fun. I was probably the least of those that were affected by physical abuse. That physical abuse was no fun.

But I had a protector, and that protector was very good. The last time that the nun came to hit me, the protector got up and grabbed the ruler and broke it across her knee, and she said, "You'll never hit her again," and hit her in the face with her fist. I still don't condone any kind of physical activity against people. However, that day many of us children who were abused physically and in whatever way that we were abused were surrounding the girl who was hitting the nun, and we were yelling: kill her; kill her; kill her. That's no way for kids to react.

This is just one example, like the example of Theodore, of the stories that the commission has heard. Mine was not as bad as some of the others like my father's or my mother's. They experienced that physical and sexual behaviour, that I believe was so wrong to do to children. I don't care who you are. I don't care what colour you are. That kind of physical therapy, as they used to call it, didn't help us. It created a lot of problems in our community and in my community.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the commissioners and the work that they have done. I commend them for being so strong, for listening to our stories. They are our stories. As the onion was peeled from

some of the people's soul, you got to the inner core of that individual. The only way that we can heal is by making sure that people know and understand the kinds of things we've gone through.

Thank you to the commissioners. Thank you to the government of Canada for establishing this commission. But I encourage them to also make sure they can release some of those files so that we can continue on our journey of healing.

What is it to reconcile? What are we reconciling? Are we reconciling the harm? Are we reconciling the fact that we have broken people? Are we reconciling the fact that we have so many things to do, that affect us today in the policy decisions we make? Whether it's in children's services with all the children or whether it's in the jails with all the people who are in there, what is it that we need to do?

It's just the beginning, Mr. Speaker. It's not the end. It is the beginning. And it's up to us as people who make policies to ensure that we continue to do that, to make sure that other children do not get harmed in this way. It is a dark time in our history, actually, and it's up to us to make sure that we get things done in the right way so that we can begin to see that people who need to be healed get healed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:20

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to first of all thank the Premier for his comments today on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I'd also thank all of the other hon. members that have spoken to that, in particular my friend and colleague the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for her very personal and touching comments. I'd also thank all the survivors who demonstrated a tremendous amount of courage in sharing their stories. I think it's important.

As well, I would like to acknowledge Willie Littlechild from the riding of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who was the only commission member from Alberta, and thank him for his work on the commission.

I commend the government on its commitment to enhancing the K to 12 educational curriculum to include more content about the tragedy of the residential schools and the treaties. It's so important that we continue to educate our teachers and students so that this tragedy is never repeated and never forgotten.

While I share the sentiments of many of my colleagues in this Chamber that this Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work has had a healing effect, there is still more work that must be done. It's important to acknowledge the horrors faced by the victims of residential schools, but we must not turn a blind eye to other victimized groups within this unique population. There are five First Nations and many Métis people in my region, and I've heard from many of them that more work still must be done. I'm pleased to hear that the Premier said that the work continues.

While this commission has been a step forward, I feel it's disconcerting that the federal government continues to reject the calls by aboriginal and Métis groups across the country for an independent public inquiry into the murders and disappearances of aboriginal women. Aboriginal women, Mr. Speaker, accounted for at least 8 per cent of homicide victims in Canada between 2004 and 2010 despite the fact that they only account for 4 per cent of the total female population. Further, aboriginal women are twice as likely to suffer domestic violence and much more likely than other women to be attacked by strangers. While I appreciate the

work the government has done on this commission, I strongly urge our government to demand that the federal government hold a national inquiry into the murders and disappearances of these women. Having heard the heartbreaking stories during this commission, let us not turn a blind eye to further tragedies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we have a young school group that has travelled a long way to be here today and has an equally long trip home, so I would ask that we allow a certain member to please introduce them briefly and revert to introductions. Does anybody object?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you're up.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the grade 6 class of Bentley, Alberta, from my constituency, the best and the brightest. If I could ask them to please rise real quick and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it has been a very historic day today, with the tributes given to the truth and reconciliation process. To the committee members who are here, thank you for joining us and sitting in my Speaker's gallery. It's an honour to have you here.

However, that has also meant that we have extended ourselves beyond the normal time constraints, which was well worth it, I'm sure you would all agree. Nonetheless, I would ask for your unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7), that would allow us to continue the daily Routine until it is completed even if it means going beyond 3 p.m. Does anyone object to granting unanimous consent for that purpose?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Thank you, all.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Severance Payments to Premier's Office Staff

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the former Premier's resignation was another expensive day for Alberta taxpayers. Nine of her departing staffers raked in \$1.3 million in severance and vacation payouts, including more than \$400,000 for her chief of staff alone. But here's the uncomfortable truth. The Premier's senior staff are approved by cabinet through orders in council, which means every single cabinet minister had a hand in allowing these severance payouts to be dumped on Alberta taxpayers. To the Premier: why were these ridiculous contracts approved?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I believe appointments of senior staff come to cabinet. I don't necessarily believe that the contracts come to cabinet. Nonetheless, when one hires senior political staff, there are a number of pieces which need to be taken into

account. First of all, there is no security whatsoever. Secondly, there is a six-month cooling-off period when they leave their office. So whether they're there for a month or for a year or for five years, there's a cooling-off period. Contracts of employment include a severance pay of one month per year up to six months in the normal course.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we've seen one year of severance for one year's worth of work, and that's excessive by anyone's standards.

That's not the only thing this cabinet approves. Through an order in council dated June 21, 2012, they increased the maximum salaries allowed for the Premier's senior staff. If that wasn't bad enough, the Premier's chief of staff was then hired at a salary \$40,000 higher than the newly increased maximum. All of this happened with the full buy-in of the PC cabinet. Again to the Premier: when are he and his colleagues going to accept responsibility for this latest severance fiasco?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course it's our responsibility as government to be accountable for what's happened, and we take full responsibility for that. The fact of the matter is that those staff have now gone. There has been a change in leadership. There's been a change in process. The previous Premier apologized to the public for some of the mistakes that were made. I would apologize to the public for the mistakes that were made as well. But let's understand that the nature of these contracts is to bring in the best people you can to do work on behalf of Albertans. Sometimes that requires that you pay above scale, so you make that change. And severance is important because . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, by now it should be pretty obvious that the government can't just blame their former leader for all of their problems. Every cabinet minister is directly responsible for what seems like a never-ending parade of perks for political appointees, and they all sat around the table and approved them, not exactly a winning platform on which to launch a leadership campaign. Again to the Premier: is he going to do anything to clean up this mess, or is he just going to keep on defending?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the hon. member would want in terms of cleaning up the mess. In fact, the people that she's talking about are not working in the office any longer. I don't think that she's accurate in terms of saying that every member of cabinet was around making those decisions. Nonetheless, we accept responsibility for those decisions. I can assure you that going forward, we will adhere to the policy that's in place: one month's severance for each year worked, with a minimum of six months because there's a six-month cooling-off period. You're bringing good people in from the private sector to help government, to help Albertans. You want good people, and you need to pay them appropriately, and there needs to be fair severance.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. opposition leader.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's see if they'll take any responsibility for another scandal. The details surrounding the ex-

Premier's plans for an ultra swanky penthouse atop the federal building are deeply troubling, but more troubling are the conflicting stories that they're now telling. The Minister of Transportation, who was the Minister of Infrastructure at the time the project was being planned, told newspapers that the project was killed in November of 2012. But the new Infrastructure minister said that he killed the project in January of 2014. To either of the ministers, who now have had two weeks to try to get their stories straight: which one of you is telling the truth?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we're both telling the truth.

What's really interesting here is that the Leader of the Opposition seems very concerned about something that isn't happening. In fact, there's no residential component in that building now, and there won't be when it's opened. That's what we've told the public. That's final. That's the truth. We think that's in Albertans' best interests.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure is clearly trying to launch his leadership campaign by bragging to the media that he personally killed the sky palace project in January, but this was after he spent weeks dodging media questions about the issue. He now says he issued orders cancelling the project, but this isn't mentioned in any of the internal e-mails that were released. To the minister: can he tell us exactly how and when he cancelled the sky palace project, and will he table evidence to back up his claims? [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, you sat quietly and heard the question. Let's sit quietly and hear the answer, please.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually, I did the hon. member one better than to table evidence; I invited the media through to see it so they could see for themselves that there is no suite there. Done and done. The fact is that regardless of what the hon. member believes or is trying to cast aspersions on, there is no residence there. There won't be one built when it's opened. It's not happening.

The fact is that if the hon. member doesn't like change orders, perhaps she shouldn't have put one in just a couple of months ago after signing off last May on the very same building.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, at least the jobs minister is starting to get it. He told a Calgary newspaper that this PC government has lost the moral authority to govern, and on this side we couldn't agree more. I said the same thing just last month. This sky palace project was one of the worst displays of entitlement and arrogance that I have ever seen coming out of this government. To the Premier or any other member of cabinet: when all of this was going on, why didn't any of you have the integrity to just say no?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we act as a government, and I would say that it's not happening. That's proof right there that a decision was made to not do it. The only thing I might give the hon. member a little bit of credit for is that it was determined that it was a bad idea. We have a lot of ideas. Some are good; some are bad. This was a bad idea that was stopped, and the evidence is right there. In fact, again, I invited the media in the other day to have a look for themselves. I didn't hear any of them use "swanky" after they were done there in their reports after. That was a word that I didn't hear any of the media use. If I'm wrong, I'll be happy to be corrected, but I didn't hear that.

The Speaker: Third and final set of questions, hon. leader.

Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of the absence of moral authority and some other bad ideas, Albertans were shocked to learn that in 1977 the PC Party created a mechanism to avoid political accountability and transparency. The TAPCAL trust is a secret slush fund which allows the PCs and only the PCs to have access to an account which has been illegal for everyone else since 1978. The PCs are brazenly doing things that other parties are prohibited from doing, and this government defends it. To the Premier: how did we end up with one law for the PC Party and another law for everybody else?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's craft questions in such a way that they don't violate the rules and the traditions and the conventions. [interjections] Excuse me. I'm not having a debate with you. I'm just saying: let's be careful in crafting our questions in such a way that they do not violate page 504 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, wherein it says that a question should not "concern internal party matters." So just be careful how you phrase your questions.

The hon. Premier to respond.

Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account

(continued)

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that there wasn't one law for the governing party and one law for the others. What happened was that there was a transition from an old financing model to a new one under the election finances and contributions act, and the party that had money had to do something with that money and did it in a legal way. Any other party that had resources at the time would have been able to avail themselves of exactly the same law. The fact of the matter is that that has not been a secret fund. People have known about it. It's been reported on. Every time the annual report is filed, the indication is there. The interest has been paid out of the fund. It's not news this year. It wasn't news last year. It wasn't . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this secret PC slush fund negates over 30 years of improvements in donations transparency. Other than the PCs, no one knows who put the money in the trust. We don't know what, if any, favours they got in exchange. We have to take the PCs at their word that they haven't added any money to the trust since it isn't audited. What everyone else does know is that TAPCAL trust gives the PCs an unfair advantage which is illegal for all other parties. How is it that no one on the government side had the moral authority to speak out for equal treatment of all political parties for the last 30 years?

Mr. Hancock: It's not a secret fund, Mr. Speaker. It's been talked about every year when the annual reports are filed, to my knowledge. The interest in that fund has been paid out and has been reported every year. Every year. It's not news. It's not new. It's been there since the transition. [interjections] It was a transition fund from the old processes to the new processes. I think it was 1977 that that happened, so there have been no contributions to the fund. There's been nothing that's happened

with that fund other than it pays some money on an annual basis, and it's reported on an annual basis under the current laws.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Please. Enough of the interjections and the loud yelling across the bow. I heard Edmonton-Centre chiming in. I heard Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and perhaps others. Pretty soon we're going to hear some government members responding, I'm sure. So before it gets out of hand, let's please return to some decorum here.

Let's move on with your final supplemental.

Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account (continued)

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as we've shown before, the PCs have made a common practice of soliciting and accepting illegal donations from prohibited corporations. We also learned they created a loophole in order to bypass donation limits, and now we discover that they have a trust account to ensure a permanent advantage over all other political parties. Will the Premier assure us that there are no other secret accounts, that the amounts and donors of this TAPCAL trust will be fully disclosed, and that he will give us a timeline for when it will be dissolved?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how I could disclose other secret accounts because if they're secret, I don't know about them. I can assure you that I don't know of any other accounts. However, I have asked the party leadership, the president of the party and the executive director of the party, to review with their executive the trust fund and what it would take to wind it up in the interest of total transparency. I believe that they will be addressing that. It is in their hands to do. I don't know the terms of the trust. I've never known the terms of the trust. But I have asked them to review it and determine what should happen going forward because we do not need to have this kind of a discussion every year when the financial report . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and Liberal leader.

Flood Recovery Communications Contracts

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Former PC Treasurer Mr. Dinning said that the next Premier needs to purge this government of its sense of entitlement. However, the current Premier said that any talk about a Tory culture of entitlement and corruption is absolute garbage. Well, Navigator's January 31 press release saying that they completed seven contracts from 2011 to 2013 worth more than a half-million dollars seems to support what Mr. Dinning said. Premier, if giving untendered contracts to the who's who of Tory land isn't entitlement or cronyism, then what the heck is?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of conversations about the Navigator contract around the floods. It wasn't news even in March because, as the hon. member has indicated, Navigator themselves put out a news release in January talking about the contracts. The fact of the matter is that virtually all of the contracts in this government go through an RFP process, with appropriate competition, but there are some times, in unique circumstances or when you need a unique talent, when you can

sole source a contract. That has nothing to do with whom you know; it has to do with what you can do.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the flood happened in June. The contract was signed October 28 to end October 31, for a quarter of a million dollars.

Continuing on the theme of the PC culture of entitlement, any government contract worth over \$75,000 must be tendered out. Navigator's press release shows four different contracts with the Ministry of Health, each under that amount, totalling almost \$220,000. It looks like a deliberate attempt to skirt the rules to benefit this Tory land PR firm, which also now employs a former chief of staff. To the Premier: is this the kind of thing you're going to let your current Health minister get away with?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member time after time after time has talked about a contract being signed in late September, October. What he would understand if he'd ever done any business in the world is that sometimes you have to get on with the job and do the paperwork later. That's exactly what happened in that contract. The flood relief work was absolutely necessary. It was absolutely to let Albertans know what was going on, and the government brought on the talent that they needed in order to do that. That's what happened. That was good business for Albertans. That was excellent work for Albertans, and it needed to be done.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, do the work and sign their contract later. Wow. You know, it almost seems like a special rule designed for something that the current executive director of the PC Party had done in the past.

When the Premier's immediate predecessor was Minister of Justice, Navigator received yet another contract, this one worth more than \$107,000, which they completed in 2010. The former Premier condoned this PC culture of entitlement. The current Health minister condones the PC culture of entitlement. To the Premier: when will you put an end to this PC culture of entitlement?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, continually repeating a phrase does not make it accurate. What we do is hire the right people to do a job. [interjections] In the vast majority of circumstances those processes of contracting out go through an RFP process or a process that's a competitive process to hire. In some circumstances, because of the unique circumstances or the unique service being provided, there are sole-source contracts. It doesn't happen very often, but when it's done, it's done for a purpose. [interjections]

2:40

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: You know, there are just days when you just don't know how to even address you folks. [interjections] Some of you folks, pardon me.

I've noticed a little bit of a change today. I've actually noticed government members listening much more attentively and more respectfully, and some opposition members – some – are doing the same. For some it's a habit to do so. Yet for others: you continue to do these outbursts, which I know that television and radio don't capture, but we certainly do here. You all know what I'm talking about.

Please let this be the last time I have to remind you today. No more of these what I can only consider to be childish types of outbursts. Questions have been asked. They're very serious questions. Opposition is trying to hold the government accountable. Government is trying their best to answer back, but it's hard to do so over the loud shouting and yelling that is becoming characteristic of today's question period. So please let us remember that and move on, shall we?

I know we'll have a good demonstration right now from the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm always nice to them on their first day and on their last day. Unfortunately, this is not his first day.

Government Policies

Mr. Mason: Albertans have been appalled by the litany of broken promises and stories of extravagance and entitlement. Hopes that this would end with the new leader appear to have been dashed given the statements by the new Premier. It appears that everything was fine all along, Mr. Speaker, and nothing really needs to change. My question is to the Premier. Will he take steps to eliminate the PC culture of entitlement, starting by admitting that it actually exists?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, for some 43 years people have been moving to this province because it's the best place to live, to work, and to raise your family. That's not by accident. Not by accident. Other places have resources; other places have opportunity. But Alberta is the place where people have a stable government that's worked in the best interest of Albertans for all that time. Have we made mistakes? Absolutely. Absolutely, we make mistakes, and we learn from those mistakes. We will continue to work on behalf of Albertans, and we will continue to make it the best place to live, to work, and to raise your family.

The Speaker: Well, that lasted a full 30 seconds. The hon. leader. First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. North Korea has a stable government, too.

Albertans had hoped that the culture of bullying and intimidation would come to an end with the departure of the last Premier. The prime examples of this, of course, were bills 45 and 46, which abolished the collective bargaining rights of provincial employees and infringe on their and our freedom of speech. To the Premier: will this government show Albertans that it wants to get rid of this culture of bullying and intimidation, that it gets it, and repeal bills 45 and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, other places in the world have certainly had long-serving governments, but they don't have the business and cultural environment that we have in this province. They don't have the quality of life that we have in this province. That's the reason why a hundred thousand people are moving to this province every year. Albertans want to have good government, and they get good government from this government. Yes, we make mistakes, and we will because we're human. We will apologize for those mistakes, and we will move on. This is the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and it's because of good government, that's been entrusted to this party by the people of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Well, I'll admit that this government is better than North Korea, Mr. Speaker, but whoop-de-do.

Albertans are hoping that this government's culture of broken promises will also change under a new leader. Ending child poverty, full-day kindergarten, and sustainable, predictable funding for education and health care are promises made by this party, this government, in the last election. Will the Premier undertake to ensure that these and other promises are kept, and if he will, how is he going to do it?

Mr. Hancock: Thirty-four seconds, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, absolutely, this government is going to continue to work very hard to deliver on the promises it made to Albertans. We are going to continue to invest in our families and our communities because they're the backbone of the province. It's what makes that quality of life, that every Albertan has the opportunity to be part of the advantages that we have in this province. It's something we have to work for because right now there are too many Albertans who don't get that chance. This government is committed to working with Albertans to make sure that every Albertan has the opportunity to participate in the advantages that we have here and the opportunities we have here through education, through all the other challenges that we have . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

No more preambles to your supplementaries, please. Let's start with Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Airdrie.

Education Property Tax

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2000 the government began a mitigation strategy on education property taxes for communities experiencing rapid increases in property values. When the province removed the mitigative measures last year, it meant a 40 per cent tax hike, averaging about \$400 to \$700 per home in Wood Buffalo, and the same increase is about to be imposed again this year on my constituents, hard-working families who already pay more for their housing than anyone else in Canada. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What can be done to help those long-term residents on fixed incomes or those who work in the service sector or those who otherwise . . .

The Speaker: The Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for asking that question of me today. You know, I think that in every community seniors and some others are going to be challenged with the cost of property taxes. That's one of the reasons we've brought in the property tax deferral program this year, to allow seniors specifically – but in those communities that we're talking about, in 2012 we decided to fund education differently, and we collect the tax in a different way. At that time we wanted to make it equal for everyone in the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister: as I've requested in the past and as this is a significant increase – the mitigation was done over 12 years – is it possible to have full market value assessments phased in over five years, respecting the hardship borne by people who already pay more for their housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has happened is that we have phased it in over a two-year period as opposed to having it come in all at once because we did know that the increases in some communities would be substantial. This now puts every Albertan on a level playing field. Every home of an equal value will be taxed, education taxed, at exactly the same rate, and this will go to support a wonderful education system. This is the fairest way to collect it, and it will be used for education in our province.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: as is done in other areas, is there any special consideration that could be made for qualifying residents in my constituency to avoid the possibility of constantly fluctuating increases for long-term and senior residents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of what's going to mitigate fluctuations is the fact that we now fund a set percentage of the education budget through this funding. So it isn't going to just rise and fall with property values, with growth in communities; it's going to only fund a percentage of the budget for education. That will be a known amount, it'll be very easy to manage, and in the long run it will create a very stable funding source for education but also a known quantity for the municipalities and the taxpayers.

Thank you.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, my question deals with the sky palace renovation. We know that there was a decision made by someone to build a PC alumni lounge, private PC elevator, and Premier's suite. We know that this renovation would have cost millions of tax dollars to design and complete, and we know that a construction company was directed to begin the build, which was later cancelled by someone although we don't know by whom given the evolving memories of the ministers involved. My question is simple. Which ministers or what governmental body, be it cabinet or Treasury Board, actually approved the initial appropriation of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member is asking an important question. All of our things get approved by Treasury Board, but the fact is that it doesn't get approved in that detail about exactly where every piece of furniture is and exactly what's in there. Certainly, not all change orders come to Treasury Board. The fact is that the hon. member is infatuated with something that's not happening. I would agree with him on one thing – at least I think I would – that this was a bad idea. The bad idea is not happening, hon. member. You should be pleased.

2:50

Mr. Anderson: Given that last week the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, when questioned on whether the legal approval process was followed for the initial decision to fund sky palace, stated that the approval, quote, broke all the rules of protocol, unquote, and further, quote, if one really goes out of

their way to break the rules, they will do so, but usually the system will catch them, unquote, Premier, if this cabinet minister says that the proper rules and protocols were not followed, was the decision to initially fund the sky palace, therefore, done illegally?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that you didn't rise to admonish the hon. member for asking for a legal opinion, which, of course, I can't give. But I would say this. The Minister of Infrastructure was absolutely right. Treasury Board approves funding. It approves funding on a global basis for a building project. It doesn't go back and approve every single change order, every finite item. The hon. minister that was referred to in the question will have to speak to what he was thinking about when he said that, but the fact of the matter is that you could not get any project done if you had to do approvals on that finite basis through Treasury Board or cabinet.

Mr. Anderson: We're talking about millions of taxpayer dollars, Premier. Come on.

Given that this same minister, the former Deputy Premier, stated, quote, that if there are individuals that acted in any way that exceeded the authority vested in them by their office, they should be dealt with appropriately, unquote; given, Premier, that your own cabinet minister is alleging that individuals in your government exceeded their authority in this matter; and given that this means that tax money was appropriated without going through the proper legal channels, will you call on the Auditor General or the RCMP, if necessary, to conduct an independent investigation into how this misuse of tax dollars . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't here then, but the hon. member might want to check his own records. What I wasn't here for is that when the building was first approved, he might have been sitting on Treasury Board. I just don't know. I wasn't here then.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

Mr. McIver: I wasn't here, so I'm just asking the question.

I don't believe that anything illegal was done. I believe that the processes were followed. When there are changes, there's a protocol where different members of the administration have different levels of authority. I believe that all the rules were followed, Mr. Speaker, and a bad idea didn't happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Education Initiatives

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always promising to hear that a new school is being announced. As this Assembly's representative for Edmonton-South West many of my constituents and I have a vested interest in school projects. Southwest Edmonton is home to a high percentage of families with children and is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. Therefore, schools are an essential component of the local community infrastructure. The announcements were great, Minister, but Albertans are interested in the actual schools themselves. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure, plain and simple: are these new schools going to be open by 2016?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking a question that I hear on a regular basis, and the answer is: we're

working very hard to make that so. We're feeling more confident all the time. I could tell you that I've met with industry members as a group in Edmonton, in Calgary, and in Banff and had other individual meetings. We're getting a great deal of co-operation from industry. I can tell you that as every week goes by, people are getting more and more optimistic that what the hon. member is asking for is going to happen. It's not going to happen by accident. It's going to take a lot of work, but we're determined to do that work because building Alberta is what Albertans want. This is part of it, and we are going to do our level best to . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Education. Given that my constituents are especially interested to know whether we will still be announcing new schools in Edmonton-South West, are more schools coming, or are we calling it quits now that the 50-70 commitment has been met?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we're still focused on delivering what Albertans demand and want us and expect us to focus on. I can tell you that since 2010 we've opened six schools in the west, to the southwest, and created about 5,000 spaces. Of course, you know, recently we announced seven other new schools and modernizations that combined are going to add about 6,400 spaces in that area. Obviously, there are capital plans being done at school boards all across the province, and we're anxious to receive those here this spring. We'll take those forward to Treasury Board, and we'll be advocating for more schools just like this member is.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education. New schools are one thing, Minister, but the curriculum is ultimately what counts for our children. Can you tell the Assembly: through this change are we sticking with the fundamentals or not, what changes are being applied, and who is being consulted?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I can assure parents is that their children are in a fantastic system, one of the best around the globe. As a matter of fact, one of the most recent studies that was released last week by the OECD, the PISA studies on the K to 12 systems across the globe, just confirmed that Alberta is tied for the fourth spot on the entire planet in terms of our education system. We have a great system. One of the reasons we have it is because we have ongoing continuous improvement. We want to include parents in those, but we don't want to overlook the best practices across the globe. We think parents and employers are asking for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Domestic Violence Offender Monitoring

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After cancelling ankle bracelets to track sex offenders and eliminating prosecution for some crimes, Albertans are sick of this Justice minister's liberal, soft-on-crime policies. They would even make Justin Trudeau blush. Last week he ended a GPS monitoring program to track criminals convicted of domestic abuse that are under court order

to stay away from the victims. This project gave victims safety and security and helped them ensure that they wouldn't be victimized again. To the Justice minister: why on earth would you end this sensible project?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit perplexed, actually, because I have already made the decision that we're going to be continuing this project for at least six months, at least until the report comes in in June, and then we can make a decision on what's best for these vulnerable women but also at the same time for the taxpayer. This decision was made much before this individual had made the question. I'm not sure why he's asking it.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that that is some interesting decision-making, here's one quote from a victim that has been impacted by your flip-flopping. This is a woman who was thrown down a set of stairs and threatened with a butcher knife that she would be killed. She said, and I quote: every day that's all I think about. Is he going to kill me today? It's a really, really scary feeling. Now no red flags will go up if he comes near my work. I'm scared to leave my office to go to my car because I don't know if he is going to come out there and hurt me. Unquote. Now, to the minister: why won't he put the victims of crime . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice puts victims of crime first today and every day. The women involved in those difficult situations have also been provided with a GPS locating beeper, again in the interests of the victim. It's time that this member stick to the facts. Alberta Justice supports victims first.

The Speaker: The hon. member, without preamble, please.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this project only costs \$450,000, which is actually about the same amount as the severance for the former Premier's chief of staff, will the minister do the right thing for once, admit that you made a brutal mistake, and reinstate the program permanently?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, there's been no mistake made here, and there are no apologies for standing up for victims of crime, particularly women in this situation. I believe we've done the right thing, and we will take a look at the report that comes out in June. I suggest that this member get his facts straight and keep an open mind.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order was noted at 2:58. We'll deal with it at the appropriate time.

LGBTQ Student Supports

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate that our new Premier wears a Children First pin. I also appreciate that when he tabled Alberta's Education Act, it stated that all schools in this province would be subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act because he was putting children first. Sadly, the current Education minister did not write this into the act. To the Minister of Ed. Despite this, you have verbally stated that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act apply to all schools in this province. Can you confirm this for me today?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am no lawyer, but my understanding is that, of course, the Alberta Human Rights Act

and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are overriding pieces of legislation and something that guides us in everything we do.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that these acts apply, I was shocked to learn that Heritage Christian Academy, a fully funded public school, makes students sign a pledge that states that they will not partake in homosexual behaviour and that if they do, they will be expelled. My question is: why does the minister continue to allow schools to castigate students on the basis of their sexual orientation, which is clearly against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the situation that the member is speaking of. Obviously, that's not something that we would condone in this House and on this side of the House.

3:00

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's simply unbelievable that the minister is not aware of this.

Given that this example of the Heritage Christian Academy shows that there are schools and school boards in this province that without your government's leadership will continue to not support kids who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer in our school system, accordingly will you bring in legislation that makes mandatory gay-straight alliances in schools where kids want them?

The Speaker: Hon. member, we want to be careful about asking for any legal opinions or perhaps anticipating a motion or a bill of yours that might be coming up later, so please be careful.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to respond. We're going to have a chance to debate the motion in detail coming up in the afternoon, so I'm looking forward to that.

But, you know, the allegations the member makes about school boards and about schools across the province I think are quite disparaging. We've got fantastic people all over the province as teachers in the classrooms and administrators on school boards that have the responsibility and the autonomy to deal with these things. He may want us to take that away and operate all those schools out of here, but many of those people are in a better place than I to do that, and they do a tremendous job on it on a . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

(continued)

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, the entitlement of this government has grown so tall, it reaches the sky. Recently uncovered plans for an opulent residential penthouse include an express elevator that skips opposition floors, grooming quarters for a teenager, and a butler's pantry for continental breakfast service. To the Premier: which cabinet ministers knew about this project, and who turned a blind eye?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think that the project that that hon. member describes is a fiction of his imagination, and therefore nobody could have possibly known about it.

Mr. Bilous: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the former Minister of Infrastructure said that the penthouse was cancelled November 15, 2012, and given that documents clearly show continued planning of the penthouse past that date and given that the current Minister

of Infrastructure said that it was he who cancelled the penthouse one year later, will the current Minister of Infrastructure set the record straight? Who's telling the truth: the former minister, the current minister, or neither?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, we're both telling the truth. The fact is that this isn't happening. I can't speak to what the former minister did, but this much I can tell you. If there was an order given, not everybody got the message. I can tell you that in the middle of January I had a conversation with my deputy, who was under the understanding it was to be done. I made it very clear at that point that it would not ever be done. Those are the facts of the matter. But it's also important to remember that this isn't happening. This is a bad idea that's not happening. Some might call that the process working.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to see those documents, Mr. Minister.

Given that the departure of the former Premier does nothing to fix the fact that this PC government has a cabinet that can't get its story straight and given that your inability to explain these contradictions goes to show that the entitlement problem runs rife through this whole government, can the Premier please explain how Albertans can trust a government that can't even answer a simple question and back it up with proof?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that none of his preamble was actually accurate, I'm not sure that there's an appropriate question to answer. But I can tell you this. This government works on behalf of Albertans every day. We care about the dollars that Albertans pay in taxes, and we will work hard to make sure that those dollars are used appropriately, and that's what these ministers did when they reviewed the project, discovered something that they believed was not in the best interests of Albertans, and cancelled it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Pembina Institute Funding

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we learned the PC government is funding the Pembina Institute, an antipipeline group trying to block the Keystone, Northern Gateway, and Energy East pipeline deals from going through. To the Minister of Culture. Pembina funding is coming from your ministry. Does your ministry support these much-needed pipeline projects, and if so, then why fund a group that's actively trying to stop them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Culture funds many different organizations, including the ones that are nonprofits and support work that goes on in Alberta. The Pembina Institute has been funded in a number of different areas. The nonprofit sector is very, very important to the government of Alberta. We will continue to support projects that support Alberta and do great work.

Mr. Hale: They're trying to stop what's going to help Alberta.

Considering that this PC government has spent millions of taxpayer dollars on pipeline advertising and travel expenses and given that the Minister of Culture has previously funded two anti-oil documentaries and since she has now taken money away from

community grants to give to anti-oil groups, does the minister understand that her decisions have put Keystone and other projects like it at risk, or does she not care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the ongoing discussions on the importance of the Keystone pipeline are very important to Alberta in terms of expanding our markets and selling our products.

With respect to how individual projects or themes are funded in the Department of Culture, it's not my job as minister to judge. We support the projects when they meet the requirements, and then they are funded accordingly.

Mr. Hale: Hmm. Not her job to look at that.

Given that we need and support all major pipelines to increase market access and given that numerous pipeline projects such as Keystone, Energy East, and Northern Gateway currently hang in the balance, will the Minister of Energy commit that no more taxpayer dollars will be taken away from communities in order to fund antipipeline groups who put our energy future at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Part of the work that the Pembina Institute and others have done that has been funded by different departments in government is to look at some of the work with regard to CCS, an important part for us with reductions through our climate change strategy and our policies. Over 70 per cent of our reductions will be coming through CCS, so important when we look at different companies and different not-for-profits. When we look at the ones from Norway and different ones and the studies that have been done by a five-group consortium of ENGOs globally looking at CCS and at "How do we overcome that technology?" that's an important piece for us.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Avalanche Safety

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start by expressing my condolences to the family and friends of Wade Galloway, a recently first-time elected member to our city council who was lost as the result of an avalanche. He was an exceptional member of the Lethbridge community, and this tragedy has resonated throughout our city. Therefore, the question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Can you explain what is being done to monitor snowpack conditions and warn of potential dangers and the necessary precautions that should be followed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd certainly like to echo the comments of the hon. member, not just for the family of Mr. Galloway but to the families and friends of others who have either lost lives or suffered injury in what has been a particularly tragic year this past winter.

Alberta Parks operates a series of remote monitoring stations throughout Kananaskis Country, throughout the backcountry, that gives us regular information on the condition of the snowpack. That information is then transmitted to the Canadian Avalanche

Centre, and that information is then used to inform the public as to the changing conditions of the snowpack in the backcountry.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what kind of capacity does our government have to respond in the event of an avalanche, not by passing it on but as the government itself?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. In fact, Alberta Parks employs public safety officers in all of our parks, and they've been, unfortunately, rather busy this past winter. In fact, in many situations they are the first responders on site, and they often assist emergency personnel to attempt the rescue or the recovery of people who've been caught in avalanches. They've been, as I say, very busy, and they've worked co-operatively throughout that period of time to provide the necessary services to visitors to the backcountry, to Kananaskis Country in particular.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. It is along the same lines as the answer. How can the ministry help proactively to educate the general public, municipalities, and tourist operators about the dangers of avalanches?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. Certainly, education and public information are essential in order to provide the general public with as much information in their hands as possible so they can then access and use the backcountry as safely as possible. Again, through our co-operative work with the Canadian Avalanche Centre we provide information to the general public through regular avalanche bulletins and through traditional as well as social media up-to-date, real-time information as to the changing condition of the snowpack so that those venturing into the backcountry, into areas where avalanche danger could exist, can access that area as safely as humanly possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

3:10 Travel Alberta Executive Expenses

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a job posting came online at Tourism Alberta for a new associate deputy minister, just two days after the Wildrose questioned this PC minister for allowing a culture of entitlement to prevail in his department. This job posting replaces an associate deputy minister who attended a \$2,000 dinner and, plus, had a \$290 alcohol tab. Was the ADM fired for inappropriate behaviour?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, currently in our department we have a number of changes that are going on, and unfortunately we've lost a long-term associate deputy minister who has been with us for many years, and we're currently in the process of replacing that individual. I will tell you that that particular individual provided the public with outstanding service over a prolonged period in the public service, and the people of Alberta are very fortunate to have had his dedication working on a number of projects, not just in the Department of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation but elsewhere within the public service.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister said three weeks ago in this House that he was reviewing the expenses that he and his staff should have reviewed in the first place, when will the minister table his review and his actions in this House?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I stated a few weeks ago, I instructed Travel Alberta to undertake a complete and independent third-party review. I expect that review to be complete, to be thorough, to look into all instances of expense claims, and to determine whether, in fact, correct procedures were followed. That review is under way. Travel Alberta will have that review and will have to review that review, and then they will have a discussion with me with regard to their future actions and any remedial actions should that be proven necessary.

Mr. Strankman: Review a review: that's an interesting concept.

Given that it does not take much time to figure out what are inappropriate expenses – like \$150 tuxedo rentals, \$99 steaks, bucket-list restaurants, and a \$90 bottle of Cabernet – and given that the Wildrose has done the minister's job in pointing out these inappropriate expenses, will this minister commit today to make that review public and curb this PC culture of entitlement?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I have committed to and will continue to commit to is that Travel Alberta will continue to do the outstanding work on behalf of Albertans in promoting Alberta as an outstanding tourism destination and that we will have the review in our hands in short course. But Travel Alberta needs to do the full discussion of the results of that review, and they will do that. It will happen in the due course of time. I'm not going to rush that review because I expect it to be done properly and in the full course of time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Little Bow.

Builders' Liens

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. The Builders' Lien Act lets a contractor put a lien on the property when the money has not been paid, but what's actually happening is that the homeowners are being held hostage in the dispute between a contractor and a subcontractor. Why does government allow this to happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member because he comes to my office regularly advocating for his constituents and some of the challenges that they have. We've discussed this before. It's important through this process that all parties, whether it's the homeowners, whether it's the builders, the contractors, the suppliers, have the ability to protect themselves when they're building a home and they're owed money. The Builders' Lien Act itself tries to balance protection between those parties, anybody who would have an interest and a claim in the party. Contractors have to follow up when they institute a lien. If they don't take court action, then the lien expires in 180 days.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some of my constituents from Edmonton-Mill Woods are asking me: how does the Builders' Lien Act help protect homeowners?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, the Builders' Lien Act protects homeowners in many different ways. First, the act allows homeowners to hold back a portion of the money owed so that they could set a lien in a case where there's a lien against the property. That's the first case. In the vast majority of cases, when a lien is issued against a property, it expires within 180 days if court action isn't taken, and then the homeowner can have it removed. They can also instigate a court action that says that action has to be taken within 30 days. If action isn't taken on a lien on a property, then that could be removed. Finally, Service Alberta also provides investigation services to make sure that false liens and violators are prosecuted.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: how can homeowners protect themselves from contractors who are trying to get some extra money from them by putting a lien on the property?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the most important way for homeowners to protect themselves is to have a contract signed. When they have a contract signed, which they can rely on then, it makes sure that costs cannot increase by more than 10 per cent, to a maximum of \$100, on any contract that's issued on what the estimates are going to be. If anyone does, it would have to be with the agreement of the homeowner. And if anyone tries to do something like that, above and beyond what the legislation says, then we can investigate and issue a fine of up to \$300,000 and two years in jail for anyone that would violate those liens. Homeowners are very well protected in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Airdrie, your point of order has been withdrawn at your request.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: We'll start with Calgary-Currie, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Emergency Housing for Women

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to once again announce that I will be spending the night at the YWCA's annual Keep a Roof over Their Heads event on May 1 this year. I speak today to encourage people to donate to this worthy cause or join me in seeing one night through the eyes of a homeless woman.

Imagine this. What would you choose if you had to decide between keeping a roof over your head or paying your heating bill?

Mr. Anderson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Cusanelli: What would you choose if you had to decide between keeping a roof over your head and warm winter clothing for your children? What would you choose if you had to pick between a roof over your head or walking on eggshells awaiting the next domestic altercation? If you would choose leaving for a better life, what necessary belongings would you fit in your purse

or a small bag, knowing you have nowhere to keep these items completely safe? This is the reality for many women in Calgary and elsewhere, who even with a good job cannot find affordable housing.

The YWCA's winter emergency response program provides emergency overnight shelter for up to 50 women per evening throughout the winter months in Calgary. Women can self refer, and their urgent needs, from basic clothing to hygiene and first aid, are addressed. Many of these women are called the "hidden homeless" because you won't see them sleeping on the streets. It's not safe. Women at risk can become victims of violent crimes, including sexual assault. Many women will return to an abusive relationship, couch surf, sleep in their car, sleep in a church basement, or stay with family in an overcrowded house.

The YWCA will need to raise \$4 million this year to keep a roof over the heads of these homeless women. For those who will donate, your funds will help the YWCA keep the lights on and the clients safe and warm. Your funds will provide immediate care kits for women upon their arrival, which includes food and toiletries. Your funds *support on-site counselling, referrals, and advocacy in an environment that promotes positive change. Make a difference by visiting www.ywcakeeperoof.com.**

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Regretfully, the time has passed on. I have no choice but to stop members when the two minutes are up, and we're trying to be more consistent in that way.

Also, I was asked to forgo the 30-second departure for washroom breaks rule to speed things up, so let's do that.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, were you serious about a point of order? We don't normally do points of order during private members' statements.

Mr. Anderson: No. It's after.

The Speaker: It was after? I heard you during.

Mr. Anderson: It was heard from him during the member's statement.

The Speaker: There either is a point of order on someone else or . . .

Mr. Anderson: There is a point of order.

The Speaker: Is there one?

Mr. Anderson: On Mr. McIver.

The Speaker: All right. It's been noted, and we'll look forward to hearing the arguments for it.

Cypress-Medicine Hat, you'll be next, followed by Red Deer-North.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

Mr. Barnes: A few years ago the government decided that their PC MLAs should have new office space and that those luxury offices should be built on the dime of the hard-working taxpayer. Fast-forward to now, and the project has grown and grown and grown. They're drowning Albertans in debt and interest payments, but office space is somehow still a priority for them. Mr. Speaker, when you take cost overruns, project add-ons, and incompetent oversight, and you put them all together, you get a renovation that now comes in at a staggering \$400 million.

Sadly, this wasn't even the worst story to come out of the federal building. We just found out that the former Premier's

executive assistant personally meddled with project plans and demanded that builders include a luxury suite for the Premier, a private elevator, and a PC MLA alumni lounge. Albertans wouldn't even dream of the day when they could plan their own multimillion-dollar living space or build themselves a rooftop garden for cocktail parties or host friends in a private theatre. But for this government approving a PC palace in the sky is just business as usual in the building Alberta plan.

3:20

The Minister of Infrastructure and the previous one have been talking out of both sides of their mouths. Before they were being loyal foot soldiers and proudly trumpeting the PC messaging. Now they're backtracking, and both are trying to claim credit for stopping the plans. It's time for them to step up, claim responsibility, and apologize to taxpayers for putting themselves first.

This is a testament to the size and power of government here in Alberta. The web of government scope and authority becomes larger and more tangled with each budget that passes, and projects like the sky palace will start going unnoticed as accountability and transparency continue to disappear. Mr. Speaker, the Infrastructure ministers, the former Premier, and the whole cabinet owe taxpayers an apology for the sky palace and the \$400 million.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Red Deer College Athletic Achievements

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, Mr. Speaker, the city of Red Deer has always been very proud of Red Deer College and its academic and athletic accomplishments. This year Red Deer College made national history by winning Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association national titles in both men's and women's volleyball and a national team championship gold medal in women's curling. That is three national titles in one year. Red Deer College also received a national silver medal in men's basketball and seven Alberta college provincial championships.

Red Deer College also celebrates the fact that 97 student athletes achieved academic excellence with a GPA of 3.0. There are more than 175 student athletes who compete in seven sports on 15 teams. The Red Deer College Kings and Queens have demonstrated throughout this historic season their determination, skills, and leadership. Four of their coaches have been recognized for excellence provincially and nationally. Not only are they part of an athletic dynasty; they are also volunteers, coaches, and mentors in our community, giving back whenever possible.

To quote from Red Deer College president and CEO Joel Ward: "The unparalleled achievements of our student athletes this year serve as the exclamation point to our remarkable 50-year history. We have a lot to be proud of at RDC, and our student athletes shouted that message to the nation this year. We're excited to celebrate these accomplishments as we reflect on the storybook season where our student athletes, coaches, and trainers have exhibited the drive and dedication that has defined the spirit of our learners, our college, and our community for decades."

Please join me in congratulating Red Deer College and their student athletes who became a part of Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association history by winning three national titles this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read into the House.

Volunteers

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 6 to 12 is National Volunteer Week. It is a time to pay tribute to and reflect on the immense contributions that volunteers, our everyday heroes, are making in communities. Generous and compassionate volunteers deliver vital programs and services in all corners of Alberta, contributing an estimated \$9.6 billion in revenue to our economy each year. Because of the efforts of volunteers, Albertans of all ages are able to develop their creative and athletic talents, expand the scope of their education, and be inspired to step forward themselves as volunteers.

Volunteers are in hospitals, libraries, and hockey rinks. They are helping to fight fires and deadly diseases. Seniors are supported by volunteers, and seniors are volunteers. Volunteers are providing support to families devastated by flood waters and other natural disasters. They are building Alberta communities for the future by helping preserve its past. Volunteers are our friends, our neighbours, our everyday heroes, and they touch the lives of every single Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is proud to support our volunteers with programs and direct funding and by recognizing their outstanding contributions with the annual stars of Alberta volunteer awards. Also, this year the government will be joining with Volunteer Alberta in the launch of Volunteerville, an online community where Albertans can share their own experiences as volunteers. I encourage all Albertans to visit this website at Volunteer Alberta.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the Legislature I'm especially proud to say thank you to the amazing Albertans that are building this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Earthquake in Chile

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to bring attention to a natural disaster which has directly impacted some of my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods. As the people of Alberta know first-hand from last summer, nature can be a very devastating force. On Tuesday, April 1, an 8.2 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Chile. This earthquake was the largest in the region since the devastating 8.8 magnitude earthquake in 2010, which killed over 500 people.

Fortunately, the Chilean government took action after the 2010 earthquake and put in place measures such as earthquake-resistant buildings and the improved warning system to reduce the cost of human life. These measures were largely successful; however, sadly, seven people lost their lives in the earthquake. Nearly 928,000 people had to be evacuated, and more than 2,600 homes were seriously damaged.

Alberta is home to over 6,000 people of Chilean descent. My riding of Edmonton-Mill Woods has the highest Chilean population of any constituency in Alberta. They are very active in my constituency and help to ensure that Mill Woods remains a vibrant multicultural community. I would like to especially recognize a few members of the board of directors from the Chilean Canadian Cultural Society's Edmonton chapter who are sitting in the public gallery today. Joining us are Sandra Azocar, Lito Azocar, Boris Contreras, and Degalio Henriquez.

The Chilean people have shown the strength in their character and resolve in rebuilding from the previous earthquake, and I am

sure this time will be no different. My thoughts and prayers are with the people of Chile as they go through this rebuilding effort, and my condolences go out to those families who have lost their loved ones in this tragedy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

LGBTQ Student Supports

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and a privilege to talk today about my motion. Today, hon. members, we are faced with the choice between taking action to counter homophobic bullying in our schools or doing nothing, a choice between making things better today or paying lip service that things will get better someday. Today we can choose to make life better for kids by supporting Motion 503, which will mandate that gay-straight alliances be supported in all schools where kids want them.

Our education system is comprised of public, private, Catholic, and charter schools where children are subjected to horrific abuse simply because of who they are. The abuse faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students is not justifiable in any school, and something must be done. The research regarding solutions is clear. When students are permitted to form gay-straight alliances and create a safe space for themselves, bullying and suicide attempts are reduced. This is not limited to LGBT students but extends to all students.

Sadly, although no one can deny the problem of homophobic bullying, there appears not to be the will to do anything about it. Hiding behind excuses like school board autonomy or the notion that preventing discrimination somehow violates religious liberty, the government seems content to do nothing. Given that this government has accepted that gay-straight alliances reduce bullying, I cannot understand why they will not legislate that GSAs be made mandatory in schools where kids want them when they know that some school administrators or boards will not be proactive in implementing these clubs, despite their success rate, because of redundant arguments that have no place in today's Alberta.

Hon. members, this afternoon we have a choice. Our actions could directly make things better for kids forever in this province if only we have the courage to make things better today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I understand you have four or five.

Mrs. Jablonski: Five. That's correct.

The Speaker: Proceed, please.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I do have five items to table today, all of which I have quoted from in my speech for second reading of Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. The first document is entitled Visual Impediments to Learning. It's a document written by Dr. Noella Piquette and Dr. Charles Boulet. I have quoted from this document, in particular the statement that says that it violates the human rights of children not to maintain their eye health.

3:30

The second document is a letter from John McDonald, the executive director and regional vice-president of CNIB Alberta and Northwest Territories, that states that the CNIB is very supportive of the intent of Bill 203.

The third document is from the eye physicians and surgeons who support enhanced vision screening designed to capture and treat eye health problems in as many affected children as possible.

The fourth document is a letter from Dr. Gordon Hensel, the registrar for the Alberta College of Optometrists, that has provided suggested amendments to Bill 203 and clearly states that they support comprehensive eye examinations for all children on a regular basis by a doctor of optometry or an ophthalmologist.

The fifth tabling is from the Alberta Association of Optometrists, that congratulates me for introducing Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, and it provides seven recommendations for amendments to make the bill stronger. Mr. Speaker, I will be implementing those seven recommendations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations – I understand you have two to present – followed by the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Oberle: I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it's my honour to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2013 annual report of the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. I want to thank the chair, Mr. Don Cunningham, and through him all the members of the appeal tribunal for the good work that they do on behalf of Albertans.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it is my very deep honour today to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of the Expression of Reconciliation for the Legacy of the Indian Residential School System that our Premier spoke about. In fact, our Premier tabled it in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, deposited it in the box for that purpose. It was an amazing weekend, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. It was a life-changing experience. Now we can all hope that it actually changes lives going forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice – I understand you have two presentations – followed by the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have two tablings. I'd first like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Law Enforcement Review Board's annual report for 2012. The Law Enforcement Review Board is part of our common-sense, conservative justice system. It is an independent body and is an appeal body for public complaints concerning police officer conduct. The board also hears appeals from police officers who have been the subject of discipline arising from a complaint and peace officers who have had their appointments cancelled. I'll pass five copies to the page.

As well, Mr. Speaker, today I'm tabling five copies of the victims' services status report for 2012-2013. Alberta Justice puts victims first. In 2012-2013 more than \$17 million in financial benefits were provided to eligible victims of crime. Approximately \$11.7 million in grant funding was provided to organizations that assist victims of crime. These programs provided services to more than 67,000 Albertans, 16 per cent of them aiding victims under the age of 18. More than 3,500 volunteer advocates, board members, and special-purpose

volunteers contributed 214,092 volunteer hours in this year's cycle to support victims of crime in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards that our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, are clear evidence the government is, unfortunately, not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Mr. Speaker, as evidence of the value of a good education let me just say now that I look forward to being able to vote in favour of Motion 503.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a document that I referenced in question period from the Heritage Christian Academy that clearly states that students are to sign this to be part of the school. It states, "I will also refrain from a lifestyle of sexual immorality (pre-marital sex, homosexual behaviour, viewing of pornography, etc)," or else they will be expelled. I am tabling that with all five copies. They are a fully funded public school in this province.

I also have a research report out of the University of Victoria called School-Based Strategies to Reduce Suicidal Ideation, Suicide Attempts, and Discrimination Among Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Adolescents in Western Canada. The document clearly shows that the establishment of GSAs reduces stigma amongst LGBTQ students and leads to lower suicide rates, so it highlights the importance there.

Here's a copy of an e-mail sent by Rob Wells, co-chair of Southminster-Steinhauer United Church Affirming Committee, supporting Motion 503; an article from the Calgary *Metro*, which shows Calgary high schools and junior highs are in support of LGBT clubs.

One final document is a fabulous, actually, opinion editorial written in the *Calgary Herald* by Dr. Kristopher Wells, whom I introduced earlier, and really I urge all members of the Assembly to, hopefully, review it, hopefully, before voting in favour of Motion 503, because it really explains the issue in great detail.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three sets of tablings. The first is a copy of a board of directors meeting for Legal Aid Alberta, in which they note from a meeting with the Minister of Justice that they were asked to present options for reducing programs and spending for the 2014-15 fiscal year.

The second set of tablings is a form letter that a number of different people sent in to me. This particular letter is urging government to stop their attack on public-sector pensions. Copies of this were signed by Alexandra Hope, Mary Cornet, and Melissa McCarthy.

The final two are, again, a form letter noting that “it is impossible for me to reconcile the unilateral demand to reduce the benefits of my pension after Jan. 1, 2016, with the stated value of my work to the province.” These letters have been signed by Robin Charlesworth and Laurie Fisher.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a column from the *Edmonton Journal* titled Energy East Pipeline Plan Worse than Keystone, Pembina Institute Says. It’s some information that I referred to in my question today.

The second tabling is a news release from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation showing that in the last five years \$88,381.68 was taken from the community spirit grant donation to pay to Pembina.

Thank you.

Point of Order Remarks Off the Record

The Speaker: Hon. members, we’re now at points of order. I believe, although it’s uncharacteristic and we don’t normally allow it, a point of order was raised during the delivery being given by Calgary-Currie, and the point of order request was delivered by Airdrie. I don’t know what it’s about, so if you could please elucidate and also give us your citation, we might hear it.

Mr. Anderson: Sure. It’s referring to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically regarding allegations made against another member or saying things that will disrupt or likely bring disorder to the House. During the member’s statement in question the Minister of Infrastructure reiterated a comment that he had made during question period but reiterated it over here again. He had made an accusation that I had some role in the approval of the federal building.

An Hon. Member: The sky palace.

Mr. Anderson: The sky palace or the federal building or both. Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, I was not on Treasury Board when that decision was made, and I’ve been a vocal opponent of the building, one of the reasons – certainly, I’ve said it many times. After I left the PC caucus, I cited it as a reason for leaving the PC caucus, one of many. I would ask that he withdraw that remark, that I was on Treasury Board when the decision was made. It’s factually incorrect.

Thank you.

3:40

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, this is a very unusual situation. I heard none of it. *Hansard* hasn’t captured any of it. But if there’s any truth to it, could I ask somebody here, the Minister of Infrastructure?

Mr. McIver: There’s no truth to it.

The Speaker: Well, then, let’s hear the explanation. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, as you said, *Hansard* doesn’t pick this up. I mean, this was banter back and forth between two members across the floor, which you’ve admonished us about in the past. The fact that they’re talking back and forth when the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was giving her very

important member’s statement: I think they both should get up and apologize, and I think we just get on with business.

The Speaker: Hon. members, both of you have had a chance to get something on the record that you wanted. It might be a point of clarification. I don’t know. But, in any case, it’s not a point of order, and we’re going to move on.

Statement by the Speaker

Speaking Time

The Speaker: Let me just ask you, now that you’re back after two weeks of working in your own constituencies, to please curtail things like chattering across the bow. It only leads to disruption and disorder, those kinds of interjections. They float both ways.

Secondly, I find it particularly impolite during a private member’s statement that people would be whispering, talking, or talking across the bow. I know how the bait-and-trap game works. I’ve seen it; I’ve been part of it. It’s not a nice thing to be trapped that way. So I would ask you to please stop that.

Thirdly, to those of you who’ve written to me asking about why some members were allowed to go longer than normal during the comments pertaining to the ministerial statement and the responses from the opposition as well as requests from a couple of private members, please know that there are guidelines that I will enunciate for you more clearly tomorrow in that respect. But there is a convention that says that normally a ministerial statement shouldn’t take more than about five minutes. It’s up to the discretion of the minister or in this case today of the Premier. Similarly, there is a certain discretion with regard to the opposition leader’s response. Typically an opposition leader has by convention approximately three minutes. I let both of them go over their time limits today because of conventions to that extent in the past.

Then we had the opposition Liberal leader speak, and then we had the opposition New Democrat leader speak, and then three private members spoke. One of them happened to be a victim of the issue being talked about. I hope you would show some respect for the chair when rulings like that have to be made to allow people to speak a little bit longer. That knife slices both ways, and I was fair to all.

However, when it comes to private members’ statements, you have a very specific rule that says, under section 7(4), “When Members’ Statements is called, up to 6 Members other than members of the Executive Council may make a statement, each statement to be no more than 2 minutes in duration.” I have reminded you before, and I’m going to remind some of you again. Know the rules because you’re going to be expected to abide by them. They apply as fairly as I can possibly implement them to all of you. I don’t pick favourites. When you walk through those doors, you’re all the same to the Speaker or whoever is in the chair. Some days are much more difficult than others, as you have seen and as you all know. I don’t appreciate comments coming to the contrary, indicating that somebody sitting in my position, be it me or someone else, is showing favouritism. That is not the case, hon. members. And if any of you want to come and discuss it with me further, I’d be happy to show you examples and to chat about it further. You have responsibilities; that includes knowing the rules. So, please, let’s try to abide more by them.

Now, one of the rules says that in order to revert to Introduction of Guests, we require unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: So let us go to Red Deer-North for your introduction.

Introduction of Guests
(continued)

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this House Dr. Charles Boulet, who is an optometrist and the co-author of the document that I tabled today entitled Visual Impediments to Learning – he's here to support Bill 203 – and also Mr. Brian Wik, the executive director of the Alberta Association of Optometrists. They're in the public gallery, and they're here to hear the debate in second reading on Bill 203, Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day
Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 203
Childhood Vision Assessment Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I would like to acknowledge and welcome our guests, many of whom I have previously introduced and are seated in the galleries, to hear the second reading of Bill 203.

Vision is the most important perceptual element in the classroom but the first one we ignore. It costs us all but families most. Of the children who are affected, some will be at a point where minimal clinical help will make an important difference in how they perform and feel. By not correcting vision issues early, we are subjecting families to years of unnecessary assessments and interventions where often simple, comprehensive vision management is all that is required. This is not to mention the high costs to school boards and health, justice, and social services if vision problems go undetected.

Bill 203 would ensure that children of school age are prepared to learn by requiring a comprehensive vision assessment for grade 1 at the very latest. This will help reduce behavioural problems that affect children with vision impediments and impairments. Not only would it save children with visual challenges from anxiety and stress but likewise for teachers and families.

Bill 203 requires a proof of examination form. As a reminder, no legislation can impede access to education. Bill 203 has the opposite effect. It will enable successful access to education for all children, especially those with visual impediments. Ensuring that eye examinations are complete prior to reading age would enable educators and doctors to rule out early eyesight problems as impediments to learning or reading. Optometry and ophthalmology leaders in child vision care have both officially endorsed this bill with the understanding that some revisions of the text be considered to clarify and strengthen the bill. The Alberta Association of Optometrists, the College of Optometrists, the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta, and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society have all provided meaningful input with suggestions for near and long-term management of

service and costs. Their letters were tabled today. Mr. Speaker, I have acknowledged their concerns, and I fully intend to implement their recommendations for amendments in Committee of the Whole.

I have heard numerous personal stories from adults who were amazed to find that many of their problems in school were created by poor eyesight and that a simple eye examination that they received in grade 4 or as an adult helped to solve many of their problems. They expressed sadness that the visual problem was not discovered sooner, and they were all enthusiastically supportive of Bill 203.

Thanks to the work of initiatives like the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program more children are getting their eyes examined; however, still more than 60 per cent of children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam. Vision, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely critical to the success of our young students.

Legislators and educators in American jurisdictions have recognized that conditions such as amblyopia, that has no obvious structural causes and is the leading cause of monocular blindness, need to be detected at an early age. Throughout the U.S. 43 of 50 states have either state policy, codes, statutes, regulations, or local school board requirements regarding vision screening and tests.

Mr. Speaker, vision health has always been important to me. As a legislator in this Assembly I have raised the issues of screening for children during question period debate as well as with my previous private member's bill. I truly believe that children need to be able to read in order to succeed.

I'm very impressed with the work done by Dr. Charles Boulet and Dr. Noella Piquette of the University of Lethbridge. Their work highlighted the idea that if there is an error in or an impediment to sensory perception, higher cognitive function such as reading, memory, emotional awareness, and impulse control can be affected. In schools functional defects of the vision-related process impair reading and learning and as a result influence other behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, as part of my work in the preparation of Bill 203 I reached out to both the Alberta Association of Optometrists and the Alberta College of Optometrists. After introducing Bill 203 in this House, I have received ongoing and valuable feedback from both organizations. I very much appreciate the co-operation I have received from the AAO and the ACO throughout this process as both organizations stress the importance of early childhood vision assessments in order to ensure the health of children's eyes. If this bill successfully proceeds through second reading to Committee of the Whole debate, I will make amendments to the bill to address their concerns.

3:50

Here in Alberta we are fortunate enough to have vision examinations covered by Alberta Health for children until their 18th birthday. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program is also funded through Alberta Health.

I quote from a letter from the Alberta Association of Optometrists that I tabled today.

The Alberta Association [of Optometrists] would like to congratulate you on introducing Private Members Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, in the Alberta Legislature on March 13, 2014. We commend you for introducing a Bill that recognizes the importance of children receiving a comprehensive eye exam in this province.

There are seven items we would like to bring to your attention that would strengthen Bill 203.

Mr. Speaker, I fully intend to make these seven changes as requested by the Alberta Association of Optometrists, that are the same changes that the Alberta College of Optometrists has

requested. I ask for the support of all members so that we can move this forward to make these changes and not disappoint any children that need our help.

I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate on this topic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 203.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now let's go to Calgary-Fish Creek, please.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I want to start off by thanking all of the people who've taken the time to call me and actually have meetings with me. The member has introduced some of the people up in the gallery from the CNIB, and I've had the pleasure of meeting them on another occasion. When we talked about the service dog legislation, then I talked to them about Bill 203.

I have to tell you that I'm struggling with Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, and I'm struggling with it for several reasons. The member sent a note across asking me if I would be supporting the bill, and I said that at this particular time I'm not sure. We've got a couple of speakers lined up, and the nice thing about sitting in this Legislature is democracy, and you have the opportunity to listen to the debate.

The member referred to the Alberta Association of Optometrists, and I met with them. She brought up the fact that they've asked for seven different amendments. I guess I am perplexed by the fact that – I know this member. I know how diligently – and she's been around this Legislature for a long time. This is the second attempt at this particular bill. She brought forward the Irlen bill last session. I guess I'm just struggling with the fact that she wouldn't reach out to these different associations and talk to them in regard to the bill and what they liked about the bill. She and I were together as PCs, and we both had the experience of winning on private members' bills and getting them through the Legislature. I think we can attribute that to the fact that we went through a great deal of consulting with people on the front line.

I had looked at her bill, and, you know, under the definitions and things, under (d), she talks about the visual assessment. I'm sure if she gets this through second reading, she's going to talk about the concern that the College of Optometrists has in regard to the term "visual assessments," when they want the bill talking about a comprehensive eye exam as per the Health Professions Act.

Under visual assessment she's also talking about how "every child entering grade 1 must undergo a visual assessment prior to the commencement of the school year." We all know in the Legislature the difference between must and may. "Must" is one of the strong words in this Legislature that I learned when I was on the side of the government on leg. review. It's one of the words that the Legislature doesn't take lightly because must means you must do it.

The next one goes, "a parent or guardian must provide to the school which his or her child attends a form signed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist indicating that the child has received a visual assessment." We've got must again. We've got the term "visual assessment." My question to the member is: what if they don't? What happens if they don't?

The third one is: "a visual assessment performed for the purposes of this section must not have occurred more than one year prior to the submission of the form under subsection (2)."

Then it goes on to (4), "when a student is enrolling in a school after grade 1 and has not previously attended a school in Alberta, a parent or guardian must comply with subsection (2) as if the student was entering grade 1." There we go with must, and it goes on.

What I found very interesting when I met with the College of Optometrists is this little brochure and a little package, actually, that goes out to every child in kindergarten. In this particular brochure is Fribbit, which I was told about by the College of Optometrists, that I introduced when I was the minister of children's services. Then they were kind enough to send a picture of Fribbit and me, which I don't know is so kind when it shows you aged from 10 years earlier. Anyhow, it talks about all of the things they recommend that can point to visual problems. It talks about the fact that eye exams are free, and it encourages parents at this particular – how well can your kindergartener see? It's kindergarten teacher program information, and it's quite successful. You know, I think when you see this all given out to – and it's a very, very nice package about how Fribbit goes to school and how children learn and how they see. There's a little cartoon that everybody can figure out about seeing.

I asked the College of Optometrists when my kids were in school – actually, my younger son was one of those children that ended up with eye surgeries and the patch on the eye and the big, thick glasses – and we talked about a lazy eye. They were kind enough at the time to say: there are lazy eyes, and then there are lazy eyes. You can have a child that was very prominent, like my little guy was with his eye turned in, but there are lazy eyes where you can't see anything. They even said that they have had children enter school that are blind and picked up at that particular time by a teacher, the old squinting at the board and things like that.

I guess the comments that are pressing to me are that we're at second reading of a bill, and we're talking about passing the intent of the bill. If we were to look at just passing the intent of the bill without talking about all of the amendments that are recommended by the College of Optometrists, and then – I didn't hear the member talk about the letters we've received from the department of ophthalmology and the huge concerns that they have on this particular bill. Then the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta: some of the things that they're very concerned about on this bill are some of the things that aren't answered in the intent of the second reading. While I support what the member is trying to do, and that's trying to make sure that every child in this province, in Alberta, has an eye examination – under the optometrists that's a comprehensive eye examination – why weren't we consulted previously so that we could have the intent of the bill done very factually?

The other thing I'm concerned about is cost. It's not costs related to care – and I've learned that, quite frankly, as the Health critic over the last four years – but the costs associated, the costs that we've found out. The uptake to have every child in this province will be an additional \$2.4 million. Small peanuts. Honestly, small peanuts in a huge budget that health care has at a cost saving. The problem is that I just went through estimates. I'd like to know from the Health minister if he supports this bill and where in the budget this is going to come from.

I've had all sorts of calls on this particular bill in regard to visual assessments. What about learning disabilities, all of the things that can stop our children from learning? Again, I sent an e-mail to the member, and I asked her these particular questions. Has she got the support of the Minister of Education? Has she got the support of the Minister of Health? Even though we're talking about a very small uptake of about \$2.4 million, I can tell you, as the Health critic – is the minister going to say: "Yes, it's a

budgetary item. I'm going to get rid of 70 of the bureaucrats that are currently in Alberta Health Services that would add up to that \$2.4 million so that we can make sure that every child in this province has a must?"

Member, I'd like to know what your reaction is from, actually, education. What has the Alberta School Boards Association said? Who's going to track these children? Who's going to take care of it? The Education critic may want to add to that. I haven't specifically talked to either the Calgary board of education or the separate board of education. You as the critic may be able to say what they've told us and that they've got a plan in place so that they can make sure of every child.

4:00

I guess the comments in regard to the ophthalmology department: how are you going to address that and, quite frankly, the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta? How are you going to address some of the things that the department of ophthalmology has said in their bill and some of their concerns that I think really need to be addressed? Can we in Committee of the Whole address all of these by putting – we were already talking about optometrists for seven amendments. Are we going to have a bill that's got 15 amendments? Do we even suggest, yet again, that we send this bill back to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities? We did that last year, were tied up for nine months on that bill.

I know the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and myself have written the new committee chair, yet again, asking: when are we going to get on to the priorities of the standing committee, which are mental health and addictions?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we're going to go to a member from the Liberal opposition, followed by a member of the ND opposition, followed by the Minister of Education, and then we'll alternate back and forth.

Let us go with Edmonton-Centre, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me and allowing me to speak in favour of Bill 203. This is a really interesting lesson for everybody here about trying to change the world by trying to change public policy. I mean, that's why I came to this Assembly, and I've been able to change the world by changing public policy, but frankly it isn't easy. You're not only trying to fight people from the outside that are inclined to be against something – and I'm not speaking specifically to this bill at this point – but often you're fighting your colleagues in the House, and that's a little bit of what I'm seeing here.

We have the Member for Red Deer-North who has been steadily advancing eye health for children. She's right. She has asked questions in question period, she was championing the Irlen syndrome bill previously, and now she has this bill. When you're trying to create a bill, Mr. Speaker, you're going: "Okay. Should I lay it all out there? Should I have the whole buffet in there, every little bit and piece possible and the pasta salad and the Greek salad and everything that anybody would want to see in here?" Then everybody has got a lot more to complain about and pick apart. Or do I just take the essence of it and say: "This is it; one little plate, that's what we're going to work with"? And if we agree on the principle of that, then we will move forward and make such adjustment as you really need to make to have the bill be successful.

I had a conversation with someone from the CNIB the other day and was just saying: "You know, there are so many people that

have got a spoon in on this one. It's like writing a question by committee." Anyone on the opposition side and other people that are not in Executive Council will know what I'm talking about, when everybody has a brilliant idea about the phrase you should use in your question or who you should reference or blah, blah, blah. All you want to do is ask a straightforward question. You know, thanks for all the help, but I've just got to get this one done. I would say that what the Member for Red Deer-North has done with Bill 203 is to give us the one clear plate, not the whole buffet, saying that this is what we're trying to do.

Remember, folks, that the legislation itself is the what. It's the big idea. It's the concept. It's the principle. The nitty-gritty of, you know, what time does this happen or who gets to do it or what colour of socks they're supposed to be wearing when it happens or what happens if you don't do it right, that's the how. That's what regulations are supposed to be used for, not, I hasten to add, as this government tends to use them, as a catch-all in which they can do anything they want forevermore and never bring the legislation back here because they've given the minister permission to do whatever they want. That's not what I'm talking about.

So I like what the Member for Red Deer-North has done here. We've got a pretty straightforward preamble. Children are important, we want to make sure that they have an opportunity to learn, good vision is a big piece of that, assessment of a child's vision is an important step, so we would like to do the following. Pretty straightforward here.

A number of definitions, and you have to use definitions in a bill when you need everybody to understand what you're talking about, especially if it's a little different from what the common understanding of that word or phrase is. So you get a definition section in there, which we have.

Then you've got the core of the bill, which is that every child entering grade 1 must undergo a visual assessment prior to the commencement of the school year. A parent or guardian has to provide proof to the school that that has happened. It has to happen within one year. If a kid is enrolling in that school, moving into it, coming from home-schooling into a more structured kind of school facility, fine, they've got to have this done. Okay. That's pretty straightforward.

Here's a bit of the enforcement part. The registration for a kid coming into grade 1 is not complete until that form is put forward, and no optometrist or ophthalmologist shall levy a charge for completion of the form. Pretty straightforward stuff.

Then we get into that the minister may make regulations establishing the criteria, the standards, you know, who's supposed to do what and what colour socks they're all supposed to be wearing on a particular day. That's it, folks. A really straightforward bill.

Then I started to read the letters and the personal testaments that were coming in from people, and I went – well, sorry. I can't swear in here. So you can just imagine what I thought when I saw all of that because, you know, here is where everybody wants to get in: well, it would really be better if it was this kind of person that did it, not that kind of person that did it, and it would really be better if it took place over a period of time rather than immediately before. Everybody wants to get in on making it better. But, folks, we've got to get it past these people sitting in here first. And as much as we love and adore and cherish our health professionals giving us advice, they are not down here voting. Love ya all, but we need these people first to vote for this dang thing.

So we're trying to keep it simple, straightforward. Kids should have eye exams before they come into school. We can agree on that. That's a fairly straightforward principle, don't you think? I

think that's a really good idea, not hard to implement. Good. Let's go ahead with that. That's the point of second reading debate, to debate the principle of it. If we can agree on that simple concept, let's vote for Bill 203, and then we can move forward on some other things. You know what? This bill is not here for the ophthalmologist or the optometrist or the dean of whatever. It is here for the children of the province. That is the bottom line of what we're trying to do here.

I appreciate everybody trying to make it a little bit better, but – I'm going to insult somebody here. [interjections] Yeah, I know. But there's a bit of a ka-ching that I can hear going on – I'm sure I'm not the only one that notices it – and that's the sound of the cash drawer going in and out. So I don't want any of you here to let that stop you from voting in favour of the principle of this bill in second reading, okay? We are just talking about visual eye exams, eye exams for kids, and if we can agree on that, we can work out the rest of the stuff. We really, really can. Don't let that other stuff that's all piling in here blow you off the central tenet of what we're trying to achieve.

4:10

Forgive me for kind of lecturing you on how we're all supposed to be doing this, but I am quite concerned. You know, in listening to my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek, she's raised exactly some of those points. She is talking about the buffet: well, you know, whose bill are we really approving here, Red Deer-North's or some professional association's version of the bill? Take a deep breath. Be one with the universe. We're just voting to have some eye exams for children. Let's just deal with that, and then we can deal with anything else that needs to come on. You can really get in there and pitch strikes and do amendments like crazy when we get to Committee of the Whole. That really is where we start to take the bill apart word by word, phrase by phrase, and where we can make amendments if we think that will make the bill better. Bottom line, folks: this bill is just to get these kids some eye exams.

I'll address some of the concerns that my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has raised because I know some of the things – oh, the Fribbit package, which is a fabulous package. It really is very well thought out. You know, I can't say enough good things about it. Except that the kids that I represent, those high-risk kids, the chances of them actually managing to get that brochure home are zero to none. In some schools the teachers go around, and they stick the stuff in every kid's backpack when it's hanging on the wall. It's like a mailbox, you know. Well, a lot of my kids don't have backpacks, and the chances that they're going to get that backpack off the little rail and get it home: not happening.

Please just support the principle of this bill in second reading.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to speak on childhood vision in general. I know that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North has been doing a great deal of work on this. Thanks as well to the Member for Edmonton-Centre for perhaps putting this into perspective a little bit.

The concept of testing young children for eye problems or vision problems is an honourable one. While I have some specific issues around this bill, that have already been articulated by the members for Calgary-Fish Creek and Edmonton-Centre as well, the concept of testing for eye problems at a very young age is a most honourable one and something that's been long overdue, and

I certainly fully support it. When we go through the minutiae of this bill, I think it's important to always keep that goal in mind.

I was happy to hear as well that the Member for Red Deer-North has amendments that could help perhaps clarify some of the issues in this bill. I think that the Alberta New Democrats have endeavoured to look for a couple of amendments as well. I think my researchers are working on some as we speak. This bill, Mr. Speaker, addresses a very serious issue that affects children and families in Alberta, but there are a couple of fine tuning points that I think could help to make it better.

This Bill 203 would legislate that all parents would be responsible for having their children's eyes tested before they enter grade 1. The parents must provide to the school a form signed by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. This practice places the onus on the parents rather than the school or health care system in the province. Now, I could stand corrected if I'm wrong on this, but this is the way I've been reading it. So I think an adjustment on that first point is in order, Mr. Speaker.

While the eye doctor is forbidden from charging parents for the completion of this form, which is good, I don't think it necessarily addresses the actual cost related to the eye exam itself. While Alberta health care provides coverage for one visit a year for children up to 19 years of age, it doesn't address the problem if a child needs a follow-up examination or if the child needs glasses. This is my issue here, Mr. Speaker. As it is with any health endeavour, we need to make sure that we are comprehensive when we do reach out to provide an essential medical service. Indeed, good vision at a young age is an essential medical issue to deal with. Of course, there is the identification of that potential eye problem and then the correction of that problem.

What we have now is a classic example of how an essential health care issue is a little bit public and a little bit private – right? – like a little bit country and a little bit rock 'n' roll. For those of you of a certain age, you know what I'm . . . [interjections] There you go.

While you might be able to get an exam for that eye problem, you still have to pay for the glasses and so forth. You know, there's widely variable pricing involved when it's not a comprehensive basic service that we can provide for children who require glasses but who might not be able to afford them, right? It's kind of like dentistry, where you walk across the road and get charged wildly different prices for the same essential dental procedure. We want to try to standardize these basic health services that people need, and I think children's glasses are one of them.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that instead of forcing parents to obtain a test and the form, I think that a public system should be empowered and funded to provide eye exams for all students going into grade 1. By giving that power to the school system, we would accomplish the same goals that this legislation attempts but doing it in a much more inclusive manner. Many parents, for example, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, may not be getting the message or not getting the kids down to the optometrist, so we need to be able to accommodate for that and bring it into the school. Would parents be compensated in any way with this present bill if they needed to take time off from work? I don't know. I mean, there are just lots of issues we need to think about.

The ministry is able to set the conditions and the standards for visual assessment for children who transfer from a school outside of Alberta, where we could make this law into effect.

At the end of the day I'm totally behind the idea of testing vision for young schoolchildren. We know from the stories, when I was speaking to CNIB and so forth, that a lot of people identify

these serious vision issues when they're in grade 2 or grade 3, and that's the time to find correction or even before then. I think that if we do force all children to have their eyes tested, then we can probably make sure that we're doing it at the place where the kids are going to school.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because there's the Eye See ... Eye Learn program. I was looking at this, and it's an excellent example of a current program that we have in kindergarten to obtain eye exams and, if needed, complimentary eyeglasses, too, all right? However, this program still requires that parents seek out and make an appointment with a participating optometrist in order to have access to the program. So I'm thinking, you know, that we can use some facsimile of this program and enshrine it in some law. I think it's quite good because it provides not only the exam in kindergarten but also a set of eyeglasses if necessary. This program could be an example of a very successful program that would benefit children by expanding it so that eye doctors are actually going to the schools and so forth. Providing free glasses to children levels the playing field for all kids and ensures that they're able to perform in school to their highest ability and also does not punish families who would otherwise not be able to afford those glasses.

I sort of see this as a facsimile of these vaccination programs that we currently have in our school systems, and we can use that as a model, perhaps, right? One day per year the professionals come in and test all the grade 1 students. It could be facilitated by AHS or maybe Alberta Ed or both, and then that way nobody gets left behind, and we cover everything.

In short, this bill is mandating that all children get an eye exam and provide written proof to the administration. I think, Mr. Speaker, that it's a noble cause, but I think that we must make sure that we are making it universal and make sure that when we actually find a problem, we are able to act on it. That way, in fact, we will get the full benefit of this consideration.

So I do support the concept of this bill. I will have a couple of amendments for it. It sounds like the mover of the bill has a couple of amendments, too, and perhaps out of that constructive democratic process we will come to the best possible solution.

Thank you.

4:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today, especially in the traditional lands of area 6, to speak about Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, for whom I have great respect. She's been extremely passionate, as one of the members said, about continually improving the education system for students but, in particular, the whole advocacy on the vision assessment piece in bringing forward her previous bill, Bill 204, the Irlen Syndrome Testing Act. I know she's worked hard on this, and I want to commend her for her efforts.

Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, proposes that a child have a comprehensive eye exam prior to enrolment in grade 1. As a parent of three school-age children I recognize the importance of early identification and intervention where a student's learning may be impacted by a health-related condition such as visual impairment. Notably, the Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends that children receive a complete eye exam between six and nine months of age, another between two and five years of age, and annually after beginning school. In Alberta I can tell you that children up to 18 years of age are

eligible to receive regular eye examinations at no additional cost to families or guardians, and the Alberta Association of Optometrists recommends that children and youth in this age range have their vision checked regularly.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education does not mandate any particular form of comprehensive vision assessment prior to grade 1, so this would be quite a change. However, we encourage all families to take advantage of the many programs that are offered for young children. Kindergarten students have the opportunity to take part in the Alberta Health-funded Eye See ... Eye Learn program. This program provides educational materials to support school staff in the identification of possible vision problems, information for parents about the importance of eye examinations, and free eyeglasses to children who require them. Teachers send annual information packages to parents in the early fall of each school year about this voluntary program. Participation requires parental consent, which I think is key. While this is not mandatory, during the '11-12 school year we can say that 44 per cent of five-year-olds completed the eye exam, which is a lot but, of course, not as many as we'd like. This collaborative partnership is one example of how Education and Health are working together to inform parental decisions through education and promotion.

Another collaboration between Education, Health, and the CNIB has provided travelling low-vision clinics across the province for the last five years. A multidisciplinary team that includes a pediatric ophthalmologist, a local community optometrist, an orientation and mobility specialist, two teachers of students who are visually impaired, and a CNIB children's worker travel to communities and provide a comprehensive medical and functional visual assessment. Comprehensive eye exams are also conducted by regulated eye health professionals, who can determine if any particular accommodation is required to maximize student participation in learning.

I'd like to note that Education and Health are also currently working together to develop the report recommended by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. The committee recommended that by November 1, 2014, the ministry collaborate to prepare for public release a report outlining best practices to ensure the greatest quality of visual assessment in Alberta schools.

While I commend the member for her work on this issue, I must say that I'm not in favour of Bill 203. Parental choice in a child's education is one of the founding principles on which the Alberta education system is built. A law that could be perceived to restrict access to start grade 1 because of a parental choice is not what I deem to be in the best interests of the child. We have other valuable examinations and health procedures that we also do not mandate on parents, including vaccinations. I believe that increasing access to eye exams for youth, for children should be an objective of the early childhood development strategy being developed by Human Services. It should be policy. It should be strengthened. Access to it should be increased. But "Should it be law?" is the question. Vision, like hearing, is one of the big enablers for learning. I believe all parents want what is best for their children. But we have to be very careful if we don't want to overstep that parental right of choice and broadly legislate powers to overstep it.

I want to say clearly that I support the intent, I support the idea, but I don't support the bill fundamentally for two reasons. One, if you're going to pass a bill this sweeping on parental rights, I think you need to make sure you do lots of consultation, as you do with any bill. My understanding is that there hasn't been broad consultation with the Alberta School Boards Association, the

Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Public School Boards' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and even the Alberta School Councils' Association or Speak Out, the minister's Youth Secretariat. My understanding is that those groups have not been consulted on this bill and don't have a position on it. Obviously, if this House is going to pass legislation affecting all those groups and all those stakeholders, it's only appropriate that we have some consultation before we do that.

The other piece and the bottom line is that I don't believe legislating something this impactful on parental choice is the right approach when we have a lot of other avenues at our disposal, including strengthening some of our policies and procedures with respect to this.

Bottom line, Mr. Speaker: I commend the member for her hard work. I think this is a great policy item. I think it's a great initiative. I think it's very questionable legislation, and if we were going to pass it, it would need more work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I have the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-Glenmore and a host of others thereafter, which, obviously, we may not get to, but we'll do our best.

Let's go, Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 203. I, too, want to commend the member for this important initiative to ensure that a process for every child in Alberta be guaranteed to assess one of the most important preventable issues that can face an individual in their whole lifetime; that is, the ability to see, to see clearly, to see at depth, to see at distance, and to see with both eyes together.

My only major concern about the bill is one that the minister has just raised, and that is that we're legislating something that is generally left to professional bodies and that is ensured to be the most efficient and simple and cost-effective approach to identifying what would be a massive number of children in our system and doing it in a way that is both identifying all cases where there is a problem and identifying where they should go after if anything is identified.

I have some questions about talking about a comprehensive eye exam versus a screening assessment, but we can sort those out in the next iteration. I think the principle here is that we ensure that all children have a screening procedure to identify problems with visual acuity, lack of binocular vision, lack of depth perception. Those would be kind of the three keys of any screening program. Public health services for the last 40 years have been doing visual screening at birth. They've been doing it during the well-child visits and at age 3 to 4 for the final vaccination program. They have up until recently been doing some of this visual screening, but they stopped doing it in the last few years. I'm still looking into why that would be. It's an important role, and it's an easy thing for public health nurses to do.

I think the problem is that the government has not funded adequately our public health system, and they are cutting out various things that are discretionary. In that context I think we should make it mandatory that public health nurses be required to do this at the three-year visit and at the preschool visit. They're seeing the children anyway. They are trained to do it. There's no question that it's an important public health early intervention method. At the foundation of it the public health nurses are the ones that have the first contact and the most important screening responsibility and then an important role to refer them to

optometrists, ophthalmologists, pediatricians, family physicians, whatever is appropriate. Teachers, too, should be very much in the position to refer children with any identified visual problem to get an assessment.

My concern about a comprehensive visual examination is that that could include slit lamp examination. It could include gonioscopy, that assesses the pressure in the eye. It could include retinoscopy, which is an examination and photographing of the retina. It could include a range of things that could both take a tremendous amount of time and be an inefficient use of time if everything else in the first screening process has shown no problem. The key, of course, is visual clarity, visual acuity, where glasses might be needed. So at the very first instance binocular vision, eyes working together, and visual clarity would be the two essentials. Some of that is done with public health nurses at age three, but it needs to be mandatory. We need to make sure every child has it at birth and at three and at preschool.

In principle, I very much support this bill. I think it's part of what every good medical system provides. It's not providing it today. That is a problem. Just as we have heard about hearing testing and making it a universal program across the province, this should also be a mandatory screening process, with various professionals mandated to do various levels of screening and the actual examination as needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I will tell you that I have a great deal of admiration for the mover of this bill, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, and her ongoing and very passionate support for literacy issues as well as child visual issues. You know, I think it's one of the strengths of the private members' business aspect of our Legislature that we have the opportunity for members to bring these things forward. I'd like to thank her for that.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard it said before – and I certainly agree – that Alberta is certainly a great place for children to grow and to learn and that our education system – in fact, we continually try to improve it. The Education minister just earlier today gave the results of some of the more recent OECD surveys that showed that we remain very high in rankings of the overall performance of our students. I think the other thing about our education system that makes it really world class is the choices that we offer for parents, and I've talked about this in this House before with regard to the multitude of choices that we have.

You know, one of the great indicators of success, Mr. Speaker, first of our education system and then later in the workforce, is a high level of literacy. In fact, as you know, literacy is one of the measurements that is used commonly to measure countries one against another in terms of their advancement on a social scale. Canada always ranks very high on those, and we can certainly be very proud of that, but Bill 203 speaks to a very real challenge that is facing students in the development of their reading skills, and that is ensuring that their visual perception is not just adequate but that there are no problems with their visual perception.

You know, to give context to Bill 203, I think that we have to look at the impact that literacy has not just on our children but at the impact that literacy has throughout society. The success of our upcoming generation indeed, Mr. Speaker, is in large part dependent on the overall level of literacy that our society achieves,

and we should continue to attempt to have a standard of excellence. What happens or doesn't happen in our school system is certainly both important and foundational. Certainly, the primary purpose of our schools is to promote basic skills, and one of those skills, of course, has to be reading. But a school is a community, and it's a setting in which social and academic activities are highly connected. In the case of developing literacy and developing social skills, certainly good visual perception and accurate visual perception and, in fact, the detection of problems with visual perception at as early an age as possible are a critical part of that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as I've spoken about before in the Legislature, I always find it interesting, and I try to make comparisons back to my background in veterinary medicine. Unfortunately, this is one area where I can't draw a lot of comparisons because, indeed, animals are not as dependent on their eyesight as humans are, especially dogs, cats more so. In any case, one thing I can draw a parallel to is early detection of any sort of difficulties, whether it's an animal or a human, with regard to their development and their ability to learn.

During the course of my practice I had the opportunity to deal with a couple of different situations. One was a case where we were dealing with a dog that was congenitally deaf and some of the challenges that you had with allowing that dog to properly learn. Any sort of sensory defect or any sort of sensory difficulty that a human being has is going to affect very much their ability.

I'm really glad to see that some representation from the CNIB is here. I see that a couple of them have brought their guide dogs, their service dogs. That always makes me smile. The service dogs were some of my favourite patients. They were always so well behaved, they were always so friendly, and they were always so well trained. Besides, they were usually bigger dogs, which is my preference anyway.

Mr. Speaker, it's widely recognized that there is a strong link between illiteracy and criminal activity in our society. While it may be reaching a little bit, I would suggest that any measure that is put in place to improve overall literacy within a society by identifying sensory difficulties is going to have a long-term, positive effect for society. I know that there have been some concerns expressed and there will be concerns expressed about the overall cost of the measures that are being contemplated within the course of this bill. In this particular case, once again, I believe that this is indeed a preventive measure and one that favours early detection of difficulties. That early detection is always something that pays off in the long run.

We will have some debate, and I understand that debate will hopefully continue during committee discussion on this, if it gets through second reading to Committee of the Whole, as to what exactly the right test is and what the right form of screening is for children. But rest assured that I think that anything we can do to encourage parents in the strongest terms possible to have their children tested – I guess I rely in this situation on the most basic thing of all, and that is the concern that parents have for their own children. I mean, that's a basic tenet of parenthood, that you want what's best for your kids. Clearly, if you want what's best for your children, you're going to have your child tested. I think that just naturally follows.

We know that children who do well and have good visual perception and are literate have a better chance at success in school. Sadly, we also know that the opposite is true, that illiteracy is sometimes a precursor to behaviour that leads to criminal activity and can lead in some cases to aggression, delinquency, absenteeism. While it's important that sometimes we see these trends and we ask ourselves, "Are we dealing with

causation, or are we simply dealing with correlation?" I think any measure that advances the critical role of literacy and, overall, assists with the efficacy of learning in our schools is a positive one. I think Bill 203 addresses this.

I think Bill 203 certainly deserves full consideration and the opportunity to improve this piece of legislation at Committee of the Whole. If indeed at some point it is referred to a legislative policy committee, I don't think that would be a negative thing. I don't see why there would be any hesitancy to go ahead with that measure.

Ultimately, this piece of legislation is about our children, and therefore it's about their ability to succeed in school and, therefore, about our future. Mr. Speaker, it's certainly true – and the hon. Member for Red Deer-North is very happy to say this frequently – that you need to read to succeed. In order to be able to read, literacy is critical, and in order to be able to read well, you have to have a good level of visual perception.

One thing I will tell you is that I have a certain degree of personal experience with this because some 12 years ago I suffered bilateral retinal detachments in my eyes and needed to have retinal surgery done. I had a vitrectomy done on my right eye. I have a scleral buckle on my right eye, and that has somewhat changed my visual perception. After that was done, in order to perform delicate pieces of surgery, I required magnification and special lighting so that I could perform some of the surgeries that I did during the course of my practice. It still creates somewhat of a challenge for me when I read, however, especially when I read fine print. The words don't necessarily all line up because of wrinkles in my retina, and that does change my visual perception. So I know some of the frustration that children, especially, can face, especially if those visual difficulties are not well understood by those who are experiencing them.

4:40

You know, as someone who has even a small portion of some of the visual challenges that some of our children and people in general in society have, I think it's important that we put whatever measures in place that we can to identify these at as early an age as possible and certainly at an age where they're entering school so that it can be identified, properly diagnosed, and then a proper treatment prescribed by visual professionals.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, I am very, very pleased to support Bill 203. I think 203 should pass second reading, go through to committee, allow the advocate, the person moving this bill, the Member for Red Deer-North, who is such a passionate advocate on behalf of this issue, to make the amendments, and then allow us to work on behalf of the benefit of all children in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Towle: It's going to go to him. We're switching.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Rocky View, you're able to go next? Okay. Let's go there.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you for indulging the change. I wish I would have sent you a note to alert you.

Thank you to every member that has spoken to this point. I am sitting here very much on the fence on this bill for several reasons. Thank you to the hon. member for bringing it forward. Boy, does it ever give us a lot to think about.

I guess I would start by a shout-out to the CNIB, just as the former member did, for being here today and for the advocacy that they do for those that need help. This one is really near and dear to me for a reason that I haven't shared with many people. I don't make a habit of it, but something just happened in the coffee room that I thought would enable me to put a different spin on this and maybe explain where I'm coming from on it.

When I was two, I had a bad vaccine shot and was legally blind for a period of about three weeks. There were three kids in my village that had this vaccine. My vision came back, but I have limited peripheral vision. Anyway, I'm a young guy wearing bifocals, but I'm grateful, so grateful, that I can see. I always celebrate the positives that I have and not the limitations. It's really all I've ever known. I went on to play a pretty decent level of hockey with limited peripheral vision, and although my dad thought I was suicidal for doing it, you do what you do when it's all you know.

To the Member for Calgary-North West: when I just ran into you and spilled your coffee, I didn't see you standing there; I'm sorry. And that may happen from time to time. If you see me trip over something, you'll know that I didn't catch it either.

But about the bill, after having said all of that, the issue of the education angle is where I'm struggling. I can't imagine, as a parent of a young child, showing up at school and not having the form to give to a teacher and having your kindergarten kid or your grade 1 child, I guess it was, turned away because he didn't have the form. To me, that doesn't sound like something we should ever do or an administrator put in a position of having to make that decision. I can't imagine the uncomfortable feeling at a school – and you know this would happen. There are so many parents – and maybe I'm one of those procrastinators – that might not get all their ducks in a row. Fortunately, my wife would take care of most of the important stuff. Mr. Speaker, I know you can probably relate. She would have that all handled, but I may not. If that was the case, I can't imagine a young child being turned away for not having that form. To put a school in that position, where they have to make that decision for several kids, would be something we never want to do in this province.

Fundamentally, I support this concept wholeheartedly. The doctor that just spoke raised several good points as to why it's important to have your vision tested at a young age. I think the concept here is to give kids the start they need and to leave nobody behind and to make sure they're ready to take on the world. We want to do all of those things. I'm not sure that this is the way that I would go about it, but maybe we'll address some of those questions going forward as we, you know, continue to talk about a better way to do it.

Just to conclude my own story there briefly, because I jumped around a bit, I think the condition was optical neuritis. The reason that the vision eventually came back, which I'm grateful for, was that the swelling of the optic nerve reduced. I have three kids of my own, and I can't imagine them seeing the world like I do, and I'd never want them to face the same challenges. If they were able to take an eye test early on and prevent that, I'd be thrilled, like any parent. Of course, we had our kids' eyes tested. I don't know if it's about half that do. Whatever the number is, it's not enough. It ought to be all of them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But I don't think I'll support this bill in this sense, based on parental choice, based on the questions I have for the education system as to how it might be administered. Again, I just celebrate the fact that the discussion we had and are having is so respectful

on every level. I take points from both sides and just wanted to stand and make a few of my own.

With that, I'll leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I want to thank the many individuals of Calgary-Glenmore who contacted me about this piece of legislation. I would also like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this forward as it has certainly led to very important discussion in the House so far.

The purpose of Bill 203 is to ensure that there is a process in place so that children undergo a complete eye examination prior to beginning grade 1. More than 25 per cent of school-aged children have vision problems that limit their potential in all aspects of academic success. Unfortunately, when children are beginning to learn how to read, they often cannot identify the problem. Ensuring that assessments are complete prior to reading age would enable educators and doctors to rule out early eyesight problems as possible impediments to learning or reading. Mr. Speaker, I do agree that testing for vision health is important because it can address various problems which adversely affect quality of life.

As a part of its mandate the Ministry of Health is committed to screening for early detection of health conditions. This, in turn, goes hand in hand with the ministry's goal of promoting healthy living. This government is dedicated to building a better Alberta by strengthening our health and education systems in order to support safe and strong communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health has also adopted numerous screening approaches for vision health. In Alberta children up to 18 years of age are eligible to receive regular eye examinations at no additional cost to families, provided by Alberta health care. Early screening that works side by side with our school system could target children who have symptoms but have not yet been diagnosed. This could act as a supplement to screening mechanisms used by our government.

In addition to free eye exams, there are other measures in place that screen children who may have vision problems. We've heard quite a bit about the Alberta Association of Optometrists and their 50,000 brochures that are sent out across the province. These brochures reach out to the parents of young children, informing them of the options for vision health.

The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, which is funded by Alberta Education, is also in place for kindergarten students across the province. This program targets young children at the beginning of their school years, and it provides free eyeglasses to children of kindergarten age who need them. What is great about this program is that it is done with the co-operation of the school system. With this initiative teachers send annual information packages home to parents at the beginning of the school year. The information is an effective way to target and reach as many school-aged children as possible. As it stands, 80 per cent of Alberta schoolchildren enter the learning environment without a comprehensive eye exam. This is concerning as vision problems are highlighted as one of the major limitations to a child's ability to succeed. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, that is already in place, allows children to be screened for many different vision abnormalities. Optometrists can then decide on a suitable medical treatment for the diagnosis.

In addition to the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, there is a framework in development for the screening of infants and

preschool children. This framework has been put forward by the Ministry of Health along with Alberta Health Services, the Ministry of Human Services, and the Ministry of Education. Universal newborn hearing, preschool hearing, vision and developmental screening are all being considered as part of this potential framework. The framework may not only inform parents about the importance of visual assessment but also connect parents and children to the appropriate vision services. Instead of specifically testing for a single health condition, Bill 203 proposes a comprehensive screening program that may help with identification of many conditions that could be impeding a child's learning in the classroom environment.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, our government has in place numerous policies and is working towards developing a framework to address the health and well-being of all Alberta families. As outlined in our five-year health action plan, we made it our goal to ensure that Albertans will live longer and healthier lives. Keeping healthy, prescreening initiatives, and having regular eye exams are all essential to achieving a higher quality of life. According to research done on childhood vision screening in Canada, screening is an important public health strategy for disease prevention.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that enrolment in Alberta's schools is projected to grow by 3 per cent in the year 2014-2015. That means more than 18,000 more students will be entering our world-class education system. This also means that eye examinations will be on the minds of many parents as so many young Albertans begin school for the first time. That is why this government has allocated health funding to include optometric services. As part of Budget 2014 \$805 million was added to assist community and other health services in enhancing the health of all Albertans. This includes vision and optometry services. Bill 203 will go a long way to complement the initiatives supported through this government's 2014 budget. It allows us in the Assembly to discuss the importance of early screening initiatives in working towards healthier lives and ensuring that our children are set up for academic success, to foster the growth of our young people, our communities, and our province.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Red Deer-North has explained, kids need to read in order to succeed. Our confident readers are confident learners, and confident learners become lifelong learners.

To close, I want to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for being an advocate for children's vision health and, my pet project, literacy. Bill 203 would stand to complement many of the existing initiatives in place and will benefit the lives of children across this province. That is why I'm supporting Bill 203 today, Mr. Speaker. I encourage my fellow members to do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. What?

The Deputy Speaker: Did you wish to speak to this bill, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: I would love to speak to this but, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I already have.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I was reading an old note. My apologies.

Then I will go to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying thank you to the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. Her passion for children and childhood vision has been long noted. From my two years here I know that the member has been extremely passionate with all of her hard work, before on Irlen syndrome and on this as well.

I also want to thank the CNIB and the other groups that have come here today to help us understand better exactly what they envision this bill would do for them and for young children in our school system. I appreciate their concerns and I appreciate their input into this bill because I think it's important to make sure that we get it right the first time.

I do have some concerns with the bill. I want to be very clear that I want to support the bill, but I have some concerns. Some of the concerns that I have personally are around the language. I very much believe in parental choice. I very much believe that the majority of our parents will do what's best for their children. And this service is already offered in Alberta. Free exams are offered to every child in Alberta right now, and I think that our teachers right now try very, very hard to ensure that we educate Albertans on what's available.

However, I understand that we as legislators and the government, for the people in the know, are not going far enough to educate Albertans that this service is available and is free to all children under the age of 19, regardless of income. Every single child under the age of 19 can get a free medical exam in Alberta. This does not cause any economic hardship on parents. Parents don't have to worry about going there and having to pay for it.

I do worry that in the language under visual assessments when you discuss the need, the requirement of that form to get into school, to actually enter into the school, you're putting a huge burden onto the school. More importantly, I do have concerns, like the Minister of Education, about restriction of access. Are we really going to tell our children and those parents that if they don't have that form, they can't come to the school? I see the hon. member shaking her head, saying: no, that that's not going to happen. Unfortunately, when legislation says that it must happen, then it must happen. Somebody will interpret it that way.

So I want to support this if we can work on that language so that you can bring it back and that language is softened so that we're able to get to where you want to go and where we need to be. But when you specifically state, "When a student is enrolling in school after grade 1 and has not previously attended a school in Alberta, a parent or guardian must comply with subsection (2) as if the student was entering grade 1," that means that at any age they enter the school system, they must comply with the same visual act. It says that "every child entering grade 1 must undergo a visual assessment prior to the commencement of the school year." This is the bill, but the bill eventually becomes legislation, which eventually becomes law, which means that the school boards will be required by law to ensure that that visual assessment has happened either at grade 1 or at any point that they enter into the school system if they've never been a student in the province of Alberta. That concerns me.

I have additional concerns that as we go forward, I think there needs to be more consultation done on the bill. I appreciate that you've started the consultation process, but I take very seriously the concerns that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has brought forward, where the ophthalmologists and the optometrists and the school boards don't feel like they can support this bill. One has to wonder. If they're not in support of this bill, what are the reasons, what are the barriers, and how can we work with them to make sure that we remove those barriers so that you have the

best bill going forward and so that we can all come to the table together and support it together?

Additionally, I believe I heard the Minister of Education talk about how the standing committee was bringing back a report sometime in November, and I just wonder if we're putting the cart before the horse a little bit. I'd like to see what that report says, if I heard him correctly. If I didn't, I apologize, but I believe that's what he said. I'm just wondering what that report will state.

I think very much that this bill should move to the next stage to allow you, Member for Red Deer-North, to go back to the groups that have concerns with this bill. You did that very well with your Irlen syndrome bill. I think you're very passionate about it, and I can appreciate that. I think you want what's best for our children in Alberta, and I appreciate that, but I think we need to find a way to work with the ophthalmologists and the optometrists to find the connection between the groups that are supporting this and the groups that are not supporting this. Where is the disconnect between what the two need, especially when eye exams are already offered to every single child in Alberta free of cost? Plus eyeglasses.

My concern is that there's something that's a barrier there, and I wonder if it isn't around the "must" factor for the school boards as well when we start saying that they must do something. Then the law will require them to do something, but we don't do that for other things. We don't do it for vaccinations. We don't do it for other issues, yet we're all of a sudden saying: Okay; every single child that comes in has to have an eye exam.

At the same time I believe that as a parent this is my responsibility, totally understanding that not every single parent is able to or willing to or capable of making those choices, but I do think we need to give them every opportunity to do that. I'm just not so sure that we need to go to the mandatory stage. I think that parents do know what's best for their kids. I think that almost every single parent that has their child in school is doing that, and if they're not, the educators who are already there are fantastic. Our teachers, our educational assistants, our parent volunteers are already at the table, and if they identify that a child needs an exam, they're the first person to send the note home. They're the first person to make sure that that child has access. I have no doubt that – I know in my own community our parent volunteers will even, you know, bring the ophthalmologists right into the school to provide that service.

Is there a way, rather than making this mandatory, that we could work with government to actually offer more opportunities to bring the eye testing to the school versus making it mandatory that everyone go to do the eye test at the ophthalmologist's or at the optometrist's? Because it's already there.

5:00

I know you talked about how there really isn't going to be an additional cost to the government. Well, there kind of is because right now it's offered, but not everybody takes advantage. I'm a parent of a 12-year-old who does get her eye exam every year, but if my daughter isn't showing any signs of needing the eye exam and she's reading just fine and there's nothing to identify that and I choose to not take the government up on that offer to get her free eye exam, I shouldn't be saying – no school board should be able to say to me that my daughter cannot enter grade 1 because I made a parental choice because there were no identifying factors for her to get an eye exam. Now, that eye exam might be required in grade 3 or grade 6, and certainly we can do that because it's already offered. I'm not critical of that. I'm just saying that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for the consideration of this item has concluded. You still have two minutes, should you choose to continue when we come back to this item again.

Mrs. Towle: Two minutes. Fantastic.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Inclusive School Board Policies

503. Mr. Hehr moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation, like Manitoba's and Ontario's, requiring all school boards to develop policies to support students who want to lead and establish gay-straight alliance activities and organizations, using any name that is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and respectful for all students regardless of sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, hon. members, we are faced with the choice between taking action to counter homophobic bullying in our schools or to do nothing, a choice between making things better today or paying lip service to an issue that will not go away without our actions, by following up on trying to end this scourge that is facing our public, private, and charter schools throughout the system. I think that today we can choose to make life better for kids by supporting Motion 503.

That is the basis for why we are gathered here today, and I thank all the people who have come, joined us here in the public gallery to hear the debate and, hopefully, to see it passed and to move the chains of progress forward in this great province.

I think to describe the lay of the land as we currently have here in Alberta, I will take a couple of minutes to describe our school system. Right now in Alberta we have public schools, private schools, Catholic schools, charter schools, and francophone schools. Some of our private schools are largely religion based. So despite the nature of this bill, we have many institutions who have been long established in this province who are somewhat nervous about seeing gay-straight alliances made mandatory in their school system. That's the God's honest truth, Mr. Speaker. Adults are nervous about what this will mean for kids in our school system, what it will mean for what their institutions are allowing, what this will mean going forward.

I don't know why in this Legislature we're so concerned about what those adults, those school boards, those school systems may or may not think in regard to this issue. More importantly than that, Mr. Speaker, we have what's called in this country the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Alberta Human Rights Act. In those two acts – and the minister there confirmed it for me today – it's stated that in any act in this province, and that includes the Alberta Education Act, you are not allowed to discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation. Accordingly, because that is the law of the land, any bill that is instituted in this province – our concerns about what people think on sexual orientation in our school system really have no place, and here's why: because you're not allowed to discriminate against them in any form or fashion. That's a good thing.

So what we should concern ourselves with in this Legislature is whether or not gay-straight alliances are good for kids. That is the

only issue that should be in front of us. As we stated before, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Alberta Human Rights Act make the opinions on sexual orientation of schools in this province who receive provincial government funding, regardless of what stripe they may be, nugatory. It does not matter one iota, so in fact we can look to the best interests of the kids.

The research in regard to gay-straight alliances cannot be more clear, sir. You have research from Egale and research just recently out of the University of Victoria which unequivocally shows that the formation of gay-straight alliances eliminates bullying not only for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer but also for people who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. The research also shows that the bullying rates amongst these LGBTQ students is far greater than those suffered by – quote, unquote – your average Joe or Jane student. That is clear from the evidence that they have presented, and I think that anecdotally we can agree from our experiences in high school that this is in fact true. By not acting on this, we would be denying the research. Okay? The establishment of GSAs in schools not only lessens bullying for LGBTQ students; it also lessens bullying for everyone in the school. Here it is. It provides an inclusive environment, a win-win situation where everyone in the school can thrive and get along. Really, it's an idea whose time has come.

But here's what is holding GSAs back from happening. Simply put, there are some school boards and some administrators who are very nervous about this issue. Let's be clear; it's most likely in our religious private schools and some of our religious public schools, most likely the Catholic school system. This causes them some concern.

What we need to do here, like Ontario has done and like Manitoba has done, is recognize that unless a Legislature acts, unless we say that we make mandatory the establishment of GSAs in schools where kids want them, you will have some groups, whether they be principals, whether they be school boards or the like, who may get in the way of the establishment of the GSA. I brought up a pretty clear example here in question period today. The Heritage Christian Academy, which is a 100 per cent publicly funded school, made their kids actually sign a declaration stating that they will abstain from all things dealing with homosexuality. Clearly, what is the likelihood of a GSA being able to be established in that school? And this is a 100 per cent publicly funded school in this province.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, if we do not act on this, we are burying our heads in the sand and hoping things get better when we know, in fact, that we can make things better today for lesbian, gay, transgendered, bisexual, and queer students and stop the bullying behaviour that is occurring in our schools and make their lives better today and prevent the rise in suicide rates amongst them. If we don't do this, we're ignoring our responsibility to act on base science, reason, and common sense for all of our students in our school system.

I look forward to hearing people's debate on this issue. I encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of it. I believe you'll be on the right side of history on this. I believe that those who do vote against this will be looked at 10 years from now as having stood in the way of progress. My hope is that that will govern the way you look at this issue and the way you wish to assist kids in our system today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize next the Minister of Education, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for bringing this forward and, before I even start, I think, a big thank you to everyone across the province, the teachers, the administrators, the volunteers that not only establish but work on the gay-straight alliances, which are fantastic groups, and all the other support groups, peer support groups, the clubs that are involved in our schools. They do a tremendous amount of good and often are more impactful than the formal education. I know that they were in my past life as well.

I want to say that it's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 503, which urges the government to introduce legislation that would require all school boards to develop policies to support students wanting to establish gay-straight alliances, activities, and organizations. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the truth is that we already have.

As Minister of Education I can tell you that the success of every Alberta student is our highest priority. Our government recognizes that student achievement and personal development become virtually impossible if students feel threatened, unwelcome, or are undergoing undue mental and emotional stress. This is why our government has worked so hard to ensure that every school in Alberta is inclusive of all students and welcoming of all diversity in all shapes, forms, sizes, and colours. This was the impetus behind the government's Education Act. This legislation will come into effect in 2015. It includes the expectation that every Alberta school will strive to establish a learning environment that is "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe [and inclusive]."

We're tremendously proud of this legislation as it contains some of Canada's most effective, most proactive, and toughest antibullying provisions anywhere in Canada. I'd like to take a brief moment to point out for the House some specific provisions within the act that will help foster acceptance and further increase the inclusiveness of our schools. Under board responsibilities already in the Education Act section 33, for instance, states:

- (1) A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to . . .
- (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

And tied to that, this seems to be exactly what the member is asking for:

- (2) A board shall establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board's obligation [under the above] to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.

The intent of these provisions is powerful and highly effective in ensuring that all students, we hope, irrespective of their differences, are provided with a healthy and inclusive learning environment. I would argue that these elements do exactly what the motion requests, albeit more broadly – agreed – to ensure that no support groups, no areas, or no clubs are exempt.

I've said in this House before, Mr. Speaker, and we've said many times that we absolutely support gay-straight alliances. They do fantastic work in Alberta schools, and we would love to have more of them just like we'd like to have more of many of the support groups that do good work across the province. They can all be a very important way to promote healthy, respectful relationships and to prevent bullying.

However, I do believe that the member's approach to this issue in the motion in question is not the most appropriate way to go about combating bullying. Singling out a specific group of

students in legislation, potentially at the expense of other students being forgotten, is troublesome. There are, like I said, many other highly effective groups like GSAs that promote acceptance, build bridges, and help fight bullying, but we can't possibly legislate for each and every one of these groups, Mr. Speaker, so instead we endeavour to create schools and learning environments that are accepting of all students and empowering for all students regardless of what their differences are.

With the student at the centre of every decision we make in education, it's crucial that school authorities and local school administrators have some autonomy, some flexibility, and a responsibility to make these decisions, so instead we set clear expectations of boards and schools to have appropriate policies in place, which is what we've done in the Education Act and seems to be what this member is asking for. We seek to empower the school boards and the schools to determine which clubs, supports, and resources are most appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of their students, their staff, and their school community in line with the resources that they have and the demand that they have. To support students interested in forming GSAs in their schools, Education recently developed two fact sheets, Gay-Straight Alliances in Schools and Starting a Gay-Straight Alliance in Your School: A Tip Sheet for Students. Those are online and among the resources available to schools and teachers and students.

Additionally, a ministry representative sits on the Alberta Teachers' Association's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Subcommittee, and the ministry staff also provided input into the creation of the PRISM tool kit, which assists teachers with age-appropriate strategies for promoting respect for sexual and gender minorities.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, we must make certain that we consult with stakeholders extensively. I know that the hon. member across the way agrees with me and likewise believes deeply in the need for consultation and takes regular delight in admonishing me for not taking enough time to consult when we do policies, when we do budget, when we do legislation. However, I think it's important to note that on this critical issue for some reason he opted not to engage with education stakeholders. This lack of consultation prevented these important decision-makers from being at the table and being able to be part of the role in development of this motion and the policy implications or legislative implications that would come with it. In fact, until they learned of it in the media, they were unaware that the motion existed at all.

Organizations representing education leadership like the Alberta School Boards Association; the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association; the Public School Boards' Association; the Alberta School Councils' Association, which is parents; my Speak Out group, which is the minister's youth advisory group; and the College of Alberta School Superintendents, just to name a few, weren't even notified of the member's motion. I have to question why a member holding such strong conviction on the need for broad consultation and engagement and embracing everyone would fail to do so entirely, on his own motion no less. We cannot legislate without consulting broadly with those who work on the front lines.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, decisions about starting a gay-straight alliance in any particular school are best made by the local school authority. They're empowered to do that. They're expected to do that. The standards for that have been heightened in the new Education Act, and they seem to align with exactly what the member is asking for and align with what some of the other provinces have done, which he has quoted. I wholeheartedly support his support for GSAs. I wholeheartedly support his intent

in bringing this motion forward. I don't support the motion for the reasons that I've stated.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I'll next recognize the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I start by acknowledging everybody that came today to listen in on this debate up in the gallery. Thank you. Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this motion forward to the floor of this Assembly. It deals with an issue of critical importance, I believe, in our schools.

I also think there isn't a person in this Assembly today who believes that any form of bullying in our schools is in any way acceptable. Regardless of partisan stripe I am absolutely one hundred per cent confident in saying that each and every one of us believes that no student should be subjected to bullying for any reason whatsoever, be that race, religion, gender, social status, or sexual orientation. It is not acceptable. I've only been here two years, but it's probably one of the only issues that we unanimously agree on. I would suggest bullying is completely unacceptable and has no place in the classrooms or in this province, period.

Motion 503 calls for all school boards to develop policies to support students who want to establish gay-straight alliances. In effect, it means no school can overrule a student who wants to start one up. Now, while the motion's purpose is noble and while I personally believe the student-led efforts to oppose bullying of all kinds should be encouraged across the province, it represents an overreach of the Legislature. I believe the local school boards are best suited to deal with the bullying issue, and many of them are and should be applauded for the great work that they are doing on the GSAs that have started in this province.

5:20

Earlier on I said that I was one hundred per cent confident that each member of this Assembly opposes bullying on any grounds. For the same reasons I am just as confident that those we elect to sit on our school boards feel the exact same way. The same people who elect us, Mr. Speaker, elect them. They elect us to do a job on their behalf, to come to this Assembly and pass legislation. We try and ensure timely access to health care, education, and other important provincial services. They also elect school boards to do the job on their behalf, and a major part of that job is to provide a safe, caring, and inclusive learning environment for each and every student who walks through the halls of their schools.

In fact, the presidents of both the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association have made that point loud and clear and, I would like to say, very respectfully also. They have disagreed with the motion in how it was presented. They were not consulted on the motion at all, and they probably could have and should have had that opportunity from the local level to have brought their thoughts forward and their insight for they are in the most appropriate spot, I think, to see what's happening on the ground. It's their job to ensure that students are treated with respect by their peers and to deal with those accordingly when they are not. From my experience, it's a job that Alberta school boards and their elected trustees take extremely seriously and that they do quite well. It's one we should allow them to do without legislative micromanagement crafted by provincial politicians underneath this dome.

We must also recognize that not all schools are the same. We have public schools in densely populated and diverse urban areas.

We have public schools in remote rural areas. Some public schools, particularly in Edmonton, are faith based, having joined a public system that has been inclusive of them. We, of course, have many Catholic school boards, who take great pride and care in providing the opportunity for the faith of their students to be strengthened while receiving a world-class education. We have dozens of excellent independent schools, that provide a faith-based educational experience for Christians, for Muslims, for Sikhs, and for many, many more.

It would be highly inappropriate for us assembled in this Legislature to use our power to force schools, particularly faith-based schools, to sanction any organization that might teach or promote concepts that contradict their sincerely held religious beliefs. Doing so may be well meaning, but in effect it works to protect the rights of one group by disrespecting the closely held beliefs of another group. We must support school boards and teachers in their faith-based schools to find the best ways to combat bullying of LGBT students or any other students in a way that is also respectful of their beliefs and faiths. I believe that fundamentally, Mr. Speaker.

Now, because the problem we are trying to address here is bullying, bullying of all kinds, whether that be the bullying of LGBT students, visible minority students, students that struggle with obesity, students with special needs, religious students, all students – we're talking about every single student, Mr. Speaker – I'm absolutely certain that our schools, whether they are public, whether they are Catholic, independent or faith based, are committed to that goal. So rather than mandate and prescribe how to best accomplish this, let us instead set the clear expectation that every Alberta school must work to provide a bully-free educational experience, provide our schools and boards with supports and resources where needed, and then place our trust in our schools, in our teachers and school boards, as they continue their work to combat bullying of all kinds.

In closing, I just want to say how thankful I am to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for raising this issue. He has done an incredible job, I believe, raising awareness and bringing it to the public's attention. I have no doubt his efforts will reap rewards for many students. I know his passion with this issue will remain strong long after the debate on the motion that he has brought forward is over in here. While we might disagree on how to achieve it, I assure him and I assure all Albertans that the Wildrose strives for an education system that is welcoming, respectful, caring, and safe for all students. I look forward to continuing this discussion and working with the hon. member despite his nonstop heckling throughout my entire speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize next the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest in speaking to Motion 503, perhaps an opportunity to help clarify how this fits into a larger picture of equality and social justice in our school systems across this province as we speak. In fact, as I reflected on the motion from Calgary-Buffalo, I realized that I myself was part of the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee with the Alberta Teachers' Association, that started to formulate a detailed plan on how we can attack discrimination in all of its forms in our school systems through education, through training, and through exposure to diversity. The Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee came up with a comprehensive

way, back in 2002, 2003, by which we can teach teachers and also students, forming clubs and so forth, about sexual equality and social justice as well.

I see the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's motion as a logical extension of this, not to exclude other forms of discrimination as we might encounter them but to be an important part of a four-point plan to attack inequality and social injustice directly in our schools right across the province. Of course, the motion that he has here,

requiring all school boards to develop policies to support students who want to lead and establish gay-straight alliance activities and organizations, using any name that is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and respectful for all students regardless of sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity,

fits in very well with the larger plan. Replace those words with another motion that might talk about cultural identity or religious identity or other cultural or perhaps visible minorities, and then you have part of a larger package that really does attack inequality and social injustice as it exists here in the province of Alberta. It's always attention. We cannot presume that we'll ever win this battle somehow with inequality or sexual inequality in our schools, but it's a good way to always remind ourselves along the way that we make education combined with legislation that attacks these inequalities head-on.

In 2006 the Alberta Teachers' Association published *Gay-Straight Student Alliances in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers*. While this document is by no means governing legislation, it does discuss the responsibility of teachers to provide inclusive environments for students. This also provides some background to support knowledge for teachers on how to develop GSAs in their school. The guiding points: a series of consistent pieces of legislation that could assist students and teachers in developing gay-straight alliances if they wanted to establish one. There's a long-standing policy there that we can build on. Certainly, we just want to enshrine that policy as it can exist in all schools in the province.

While students and staff may want to start a gay-straight alliance in their school, an unexpected push-back may in fact come from school administrations working out of fear that parents will be complaining or protesting. Alternatively, some parents may feel that it is against their rights to have the child exposed to a gay-straight alliance on religious grounds. This combination of push-back or expected push-back is a problem that we need to overcome. That's why this motion is so important.

Mr. Speaker, from the fact that Bill 44 education aspects were passed as one of the bigger barriers for schools who actually want to start GSAs or undertake any activity to promote inclusion in their schools, if parents are given the legislative authority to put their kids out of discussions that deal with sexuality or gender expression, then schools are hesitant to pursue this. That's exactly the problem with Bill 44. So until we remove that part of Bill 44 that allows that sort of activity to take place, then that's the actual legislative barrier that this motion seeks to counteract. Again, I really admire the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this forward.

5:30

Bill 44 creates an environment where schools are confused as to what they can or cannot talk about. The need to opt out or to notify: those clauses also create unneeded layers of uncertainty. If a gay-straight alliance wants to hold any activity or meeting, it would have to inform all parents. This bill needs to be repealed, Mr. Speaker. Even as we pass legislation to mandate the creation

of gay-straight alliances, the fact that Bill 44 is on the books makes an actual implementation of this motion very difficult.

Edmonton public school boards have already had similar types of policy in place for teachers, students, and schools to develop GSAs in their schools. As well, Edmonton public schools, I think, provides an excellent example to provide some model that we can use across the province.

Gay-straight alliances have demonstrated a history of success as advocates for the LGBTQ youth as well as proponents of school safety. We know that where there is the existence of GSAs, the problems with discrimination and violence are reduced. It's important that institutional support must be provided as well to students and educators who wish to establish and lead these groups. Support from above eases resistance from students, teachers, and the community and provides validation for those engaged in this important work.

Contemporary research demonstrates that discrimination of all kinds is rare within schools, as I said, that actively promote the appreciation of differences and a sense of community. The empowerment of oppressed groups means empowering everyone in the end, Mr. Speaker. We've seen examples of this in Ontario as well that have worked quite well. I can also speak from personal experience teaching in schools, Edmonton public schools such as Victoria school, where there was not just a GSA but an active attempt to educate all students and parents and teachers and support staff in regard to equality and social justice issues in regard to sexuality, which paid dividends far beyond anything that we could imagine.

This motion is very modest. Like I say, I gave you a bit of a historical context from whence it came, and in the interests of a larger pursuit of equality and social justice I believe that not only is the member's motion's heart in the right place, but the words and the action that surround it are, too. So, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this motion. In the spirit of optimism and a sense of equality it's something we can be proud of moving to the future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll next recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, followed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just trying to remind myself that it's 2014. I actually had a kind of really nice, happy, kind of weepy response that I was going to do in supporting Motion 503, and then some people spoke. So I'm not going to be quite so nice as I thought I was going to be. I really am struggling particularly with the Minister of Education's remarks that somehow the new inclusive Education Act is just as good as accepting a motion that actually would take action to allow gay-straight alliances. This particularly burns me when that act took out the mention of the Alberta Human Rights Act, which was in there before. So does the minister have credibility with me when he says that that act is going to be just as good and that's the act that took out the mention of the Alberta Human Rights Act? No. It doesn't carry a lot of weight with me.

You know, the second thing that should have happened there, when we were talking about inclusive education, was to make sure that this Assembly went and opened up the Human Rights Act and removed the odious section 11.1, in which parental rights were allowed to trump any discussion in a classroom of sexual orientation. So, on the one hand, that new human rights act actually recognizes sexual orientation under our protected grounds

and at exactly the same time comes out with a monster big club and says: but you're not allowed to talk about that or refer to it in a classroom or people can remove their children or blah, blah, blah. A huge amount of misunderstanding and, frankly, homophobia flowed from that.

It's 2014. We actually are in a new century here, and I will not accept the Minister of Education standing up and saying that that act is going to be as good as what's being proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you know, that a code of conduct is somehow as good as a student-driven effort in which they devise actual action to move forward on this issue as compared to a bunch of talk, a bunch of words. We're trying to empower students that are going to come together and make their peers and themselves better equipped to deal with the world. But no. We're going to take a step back here and say: well, we're worried about parental rights. You have your parental rights. You've got everything you need from parental rights. You can remove your kids from the classroom right now, and that's what that bill gave to us. So you've got lots of parental rights if you're not comfortable with this.

What this motion is trying to do is actually give those kids some tools to move ahead. We want to make sure that all kids, all schools get to move ahead, that we don't end up with – what was it? – oh, yes, inequality. Somebody said that somehow we would have equality across the schools if we don't put this in. What you'll get if you don't put this in is inequality. You'll have some schools that will allow GSAs or support them and others that won't, and they don't want to be seen making that decision. They want somebody else to say to them: you do this; that's it.

Let me take a little sidebar here, a little, wee tangent. I don't know what it is that's just happened in this Assembly. Somehow with the two private member driven proposals that have come forward today, all of a sudden people have an expectation that we have massive departments and a lot of staff that are going to go out and consult with all these people, that we've got budgets to mail stuff out and launch websites and go and consult all these people, or that somehow the work of Bill 203 isn't worth it because she didn't consult everyone in the world twice or that this member – I mean, we share exactly four researchers. How do you expect us to go out and consult with all these different groups? That's just not a possibility on this side of the House. I'm sorry that you've never had that experience, and I cannot tell you how much I'm looking forward to you having that experience. Okay.

That's what was meant to happen here, that this would be an opportunity to actually support kids that want to get together. This is the mushy part. Now, I was very lucky to grow up as a drama kid. Drama kids tend to pull into their group a lot of other kids that feel like they're misfits or a little strange or weird, and often that strangeness or weirdness was a kid that was trying to work out their gender identity or their sexual orientation. So we felt very protective, and we were very strong groups that incorporated everybody. We didn't separate anybody out. We protected everybody and moved forward. So the idea of a gay-straight alliance is really home to me. It feels right because I had the advantage of that, not named that but essentially the same thing.

The other thing that really strikes me about this is the ISMSS and the development of Camp fYrefly, which is the camp for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans kids, in which they get to go to camp and be gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, two-spirited kids. At the fundraising events that we had been to to raise money for this camp – to see grown men weeping because they didn't get that opportunity. There was no place for them to go where it was safe, where they could talk about those questions that they had or how they felt.

5:40

It's quite magical as grown-ups to be able to support something that younger people are trying to do to make their world a better place, and I think it's important that we support Motion 503 for exactly that reason. It is an opportunity for kids to be with their peers and to be normal, to be okay, to be included. That is normal. You know, folks, it is normal. We do have all kinds of kids. They come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, including different sexual orientations, different gender identities.

Mr. Hehr: And they go to religious schools.

Ms Blakeman: And some of them go to religious schools. Some of them go to private schools. Some of them are home-schooled. Some kids are in the public school system. If you're in the Edmonton public school system, you even get it better because their board actually passed a gay-positive, a queer-positive motion in the way they were going to deliver education. This is to make sure that all kids are going to get that benefit, not picking and choosing which schools are going to deliver it but making sure that that opportunity is there.

I really like the wording of the motion that says that if the kids identify that they want to have this gay-straight alliance, then the schools will help them do that. They don't have to run it. They don't have to be the boss. They just have to facilitate that this organization will come together for those kids. That's exactly the way it should be.

Ah, yes, here we have it. This is the Camp fYrefly special emblem, and some of you, I know, have been. Some of my colleagues on the other side have supported Camp fYrefly's efforts. Thank you very much for that. I know Kris Wells was here earlier. We've got a number of people in the gallery. Some pink shirts from the University of Alberta. Thank you. My fabulous constituent, Rob Wells. I know that Ben from the Pride Centre is here and a number of other people. Thank you very much for coming out for this. It's important that you see how democracy works and how it's a bit of a slugfest sometimes.

I do encourage people to support this. It's for the kids. You know, for all the parental rights and all of the inequalities in the ways schools are operated and what their mandates are, at no point should we ever be saying that you can discriminate against someone because of your religion. That is the antithesis of what we should be doing here. In particular, when we know that there are kids out there that need this special kind of support from their peers, we should not be denying it. We should be the leaders, here in the Legislative Assembly, that are making this possible and are making it possible across the board so that there are no exceptions in the schools and the school boards that are delivering this particular program for them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to Motion 503, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. This motion, as we all know, urges the government to support students who wish to establish gay-straight alliances in their schools. I am honoured to have LGBTQ issues in my mandate, the first time in this province's history, and I take that very seriously.

Specifically, Motion 503 calls for the introduction of legislation that would require school boards to implement policies that would

provide those supports. Now, I understand that in general school boards need to have the autonomy to assess the needs of their school communities, and the prevailing opinion is that gay-straight alliances in a particular school are best decided by the local school authority and the school. But this is what I'm struggling with. There is an inherent disconnect between embracing the value and success of student-led GSAs and then saying: by the way, if a school board is uncomfortable with it, then it's not student-led at all. This is my problem with the arguments I'm hearing.

The key to the importance of this motion is that it supports students who want to establish gay-straight alliances in their schools. Now, why would students want to do that? They want to do that because (a) they have gay students in their schools, and I bet you every school in this province does, and (b) students want to encourage support and acceptance of LGBTQ issues. With respect, a board superintendent, even a teacher cannot assess the level of acceptance and even safety a student feels more than the students themselves. Students have to have the freedom to decide if a gay-straight alliance is needed in their school, and if they do, we need to ensure they have the right to establish them. It is the right thing to do.

So, yes, I wholeheartedly support Motion 503 and the efforts of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Gay-straight alliances are extremely important. They are an important component of any inclusive school environment that endeavours to reinforce positivity and inclusiveness in the process of learning. They promote understanding, and they cut down on bullying behaviour. Everyone agrees on that.

I am proud of our government's School Act, that calls for schools to be safe and inclusive spaces. I think that's wonderful. I believe that empathy and humane respect for one another are prerequisites for any meaningful education. This is why we have to continue to strengthen our commitment to fostering respect and diversity in all the schools in Alberta. It is impossible to learn in an environment in which one feels unsafe or belittled. This goes for every single student as well as for teachers, administrators, and even parents, for that matter.

Under section 45 of the School Act all school boards are expected to conduct themselves in compliance with this most basic, fundamental necessity for positive student learning. This takes into account the fundamental fact that a one-size-fits-all policy is neither a practical nor a realistic approach for conducting business or delivering education. Just as we rightly expect school boards to respect diversity in our students, we also have to respect our students' ability to decide if they need a gay-straight alliance. It cannot be student led if the board has the ability to veto it. This is not about taking power away from school boards; it's about giving power to students to make safer school environments.

Alberta is an incredibly diverse province, Mr. Speaker. That means that the diversity is not only in our landscapes; it's in each school board from Calgary to Edmonton to Lethbridge to Cold Lake. They all face their own unique circumstances. We know that all schools in the province may not want a gay-straight alliance, but that need isn't a board's to determine; it's a student's to determine. This is not a question of religious rights, and it's not a question of sexuality as much as it is a question of the right to free speech and free assembly.

Students are driving this issue forward. My concern about a school's or a school board's ability to opt out of allowing a gay-straight alliance is that in some conservative school cultures that gay-straight alliance might be vitally important, perhaps crucial, to an LGBTQ student's feeling of safety and inclusivity. It's important to remember that, first and foremost, all GSAs are grounded in issues of equal access and accommodation which are

firmly established and protected in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and all provincial and territorial rights statutes.

Importantly, the core function and mandate of school-based GSAs are related to meeting the significant health and safety needs of LGBTQ and allied students. GSAs in faith-based and other communities play a critical and important role in helping to build vibrant, welcoming, and faith-affirming classrooms in schools for LGBTQ students, teachers, and same-sex parented families.

I want to close with the words of Patrick Burke, the president of the You Can Play team to end homophobia in sports: 64 per cent of LGBTQ students say they feel unsafe in their own schools. Sixty-four per cent. A gay student is five times more likely to drop out of school. A gay student is three times more likely to attempt suicide than a heterosexual teenager. We have teenagers, children, who feel so worthless that they would rather tie a rope around a tree than face another day in school. Gay-straight alliances help LGBTQ students feel safer in schools. They reduce bullying. They promote acceptance. Making sure every LGBTQ student in this province has the opportunity to be part of one is the right thing to do in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we probably won't get to all of these speakers, but for the record I have the members for Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Calgary-West, and Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak in defence of the Alberta LGBTQ community and the youth community and to support Motion 503, put forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Growing up is tough. It can be tough growing up at the best of times, but it's also tougher when you're made to feel different. Many of us are from different walks of life, different cultures, different parts of the world. Many of us have experienced this. We heard these stories earlier in the Legislature on another motion.

Mr. Speaker, you know, bullying actually leads to assault. All evidence points that those kids who do the bullying end up later on in life with a higher chance of becoming criminals; those who get bullied have a higher chance of depression, anxiety, alienation, and, the ultimate, suicide. I've seen many effects as an inner-city trauma doctor on young people, who overdose and come to us. Many young people slit their wrists because they're made to feel that they don't belong.

When this happens to children, especially children in a school system – imagine going to school every day wondering if you're going to get beat up, how you're going to be treated, and no one is going to stand up for you. Sometimes in certain areas, heck, the teachers are part of the problem. If the administrators of a school system don't have the courage to allow children to feel safe, how are these children going to feel? These are democratically elected administrators of school systems.

Mr. Speaker, we all need to send a message as policy-makers – the buck stops with us in the Legislature – on the tone of respect and dignity and how we as a society should treat one another. That's what we're talking about here today, about how we speak daily about one another. Now, as you know, this country is founded on principles of freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom to express who you are as an individual and to speak freely about it and not promote hate.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of stuff has been said, and I thank the hon. members in the PC caucus for showing support and making compassionate, very rational arguments to support this motion. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals, as the leader, I'm proud to stand here and support the LGBTQ community, support our children. It's about our kids, about making them feel safe and welcome and, really, about building a better, more inclusive Alberta, a more inclusive Canada. I believe it's time that we had the courage to say: hey, this is not the Alberta of yesterday; this is the Alberta of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, I'll say one thing. This province is growing. We've got people from all over the world and all over the country, from all walks of life, from all religions, from all sexual orientations. They're all Albertans like anybody else. It is the duty of the majority to protect the minority, and that's exactly what is an absolute, fundamental principle of democracy. There is a pollster who actually spoke, you know, and showed the polling of the country and the province. These are comments from a pollster from Ipsos-Reid. He said that there will be little room in Alberta for those who are homophobic or bigoted, that this is not who Albertans are; this is not who Canadians are.

I would encourage every member of this Assembly to support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you have 30 seconds if you'd like to participate.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, bullying in schools is not restricted to the LGBTQ community. In fact, I was bullied when I was in school, throughout school. Many would not know that I actually grew eight inches after high school. I was the shrimpiest, tiniest little kid in school. Also, in the work that I've done in the community and religious work, there are many people that get bullied because of their religious beliefs. So to single out a situation is not necessarily appropriate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate. I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate on Motion 503.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think many viewpoints were put forward here today, yet I stand by the statement that today in this Legislature we can choose to do nothing, or we can choose to do something that will make kids' lives better today. I could submit that this motion, which will allow the formation of gay-straight alliances in schools where kids want them established, is what will help move our society forward, will help our LGBTQ community not only to live with more pride, more dignity, but it will also reduce bullying that occurs in our schools for those students as well as for all students who attend that school.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, the reason why we need to act today is exactly the reason that Kris Wells wrote about in the *Calgary Herald*. I'm going to quote from Dr. Wells's article right now.

This religious resistance is exactly the reason governments in both Manitoba and Ontario have legislated that all schools must support any student who wants to start a GSA and name it as such. Alberta [should] follow suit. The status quo is no longer acceptable. If we fail to act, we will do nothing more than allow discrimination to flourish and we will continue to build an apartheid system of education in our province where LGBTQ

students are treated as second-class citizens in their own schools. This is not the kind of Alberta that I want to build.

I stand with Dr. Wells on this. I do not want to build that kind of Alberta either.

Simply put, without us legislating this here in this province – maybe we are only urging the government to do this in this motion – if we do not legislate this in this province because of religious reasons and many of those reasons which I think are no longer valid, school systems, school boards, and some administrators will not be willing to allow kids to establish a gay-straight alliance. It's particularly for that reason that we need to ask.

You saw the statistics brought up by the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, who, in my view, gave the best speech on this issue here today. It was clear, it was cogent, and it hit all the right notes in terms of protecting children in our society. If you heard the statistics she brought up about the rate of children being bullied in our schools, how some of them do not even want to go to school because the bullying is so bad that it's leading them to commit suicide, that should be reason enough for every member who is here today to vote in favour of us moving forward on this issue. To not do it is simply to deny what is happening in our schools, to deny that there is a problem, to deny that things won't get better on their own, because they won't. They won't. We would simply be delaying this for another 15, 20 years.

I urge everyone in this Assembly to do the right thing, to do what I believe is not only good for our kids but good for our society.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone for listening. Do the right thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Fawcett	Lukaszuk
Blakeman	Hehr	Notley
Brown	Hughes	Scott
Calahasen	Jansen	Sherman
Dallas	Klimchuk	Swann
DeLong	Luan	Woo-Paw
Eggen		

6:10

Against the motion:

Amery	Fraser	Oberle
Anderson	Fritz	Pastoor
Barnes	Goudreau	Rodney
Bikman	Johnson, J.	Rowe
Campbell	Johnson, L.	Saskiw
Casey	Kubinec	Starke
Cusanelli	Leskiw	Strankman
Donovan	McAllister	Towle
Dorward	McDonald	VanderBurg
Drysdale	McQueen	Weadick
Fenske		

Totals: For – 19 Against – 31

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it is past 6 o'clock, and the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

The Legislative Policy Committee on Resource Stewardship will convene this evening in committee room A for the consideration of the main estimates of Transportation at 7 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:13 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

Issue 14

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members and all.

Let us pray, and let us be thankful for the great bounty that we enjoy in this wonderful province called Alberta, where our families can feel safe and secure, can live free from persecution and imposed strife, and can share in a global culture that is truly respectful of others. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member's 12th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go to Introduction of Guests, let me take a moment and remind you that today we have a member among us who is celebrating his 12th anniversary as an elected member of this Legislative Assembly. So please join me in thanking him for his service to this Assembly and to Albertans as I extend congratulations to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with the Minister of Energy, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you an outstanding group of students and their teachers and parent helpers from the elementary school in the community of Calmar in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. These 34 bright grade 6 students along with their teachers Ms Jeanette Wilson, Scott Olsen, Kathleen Sikliski and parent helpers Rebecca Eilander and Troy Mutch are here with us. Please, let's give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 66 of the very best and brightest grade 6 students that I've had the pleasure of meeting, from the wonderful school of St. Augustine. They are here with their teachers Sharon Hackett, Romeo Cruzat Mandanas, Ken Hackett, Laura Engler and parent helpers Melissa Ocampo, Brandon Bishop, Courtney Louis, Michelle Auclair, Nancy Giles, Gilda Soosay-Horvath, and Erin Fleck. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups or youth to be introduced?

If not, let us move on to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly representatives from the Turkic-Canadian community. Today the Turkic-Canadian community came to the Legislature to

share their cultural heritage. Participating countries such as Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Uzbekistan put on a wonderful display of arts, crafts, and great food, including the famous Noah's pudding, all very typical of the grand Turkic tradition.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to introduce the following representatives that are seated today in your gallery. My apologies if I struggle with some of the pronunciation of these names: Cuneyt Zumrutpinar, the Anatolian Heritage Federation; Ibrahim Cin, the Intercultural Dialogue Institute, Edmonton; Orhan Benli, the Anatolian Heritage Federation; Nazgul Aitkulova from the Kyrgyzstan community; Malik Muradov from Turkmenistan; and Kenan Tuzlak from Bosnia-Herzegovina. There are also many other community representatives seated today in both galleries. I would now ask all our guests in the galleries to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon three guests of the Assembly who are seated in the members' gallery and are visiting us from Writing-on-Stone provincial park. I'd ask them to rise as I read their names: Aaron Domes, who is the head of visitors' services; Suzanne Lodermeier, who is the visitors' centre co-ordinator; and Juanita Tallman, who is an interpretive supervisor. This exceptional team was the driving force behind the First Nations interpretive internship program at Writing-on-Stone provincial park. This program provides visitors to the park with an authentic Blackfoot cultural experience and recently won the gold medal at the Institute of Public Administration of Canada public-sector leadership awards. They have risen, and I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The leader of the loyal opposition, followed by Medicine Hat.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Troy Mutch, national president of the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association. Troy has been honoured with several awards, including the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee medal for his leadership and commitment in the Canadian fire services, and he is also one of Alberta's flood heroes. Troy helped bring Tide's loads of hope to High River, which enabled the residents to have clean clothes along with some sense of normalcy. But today he's here as a father, accompanying his son's class to learn about the Legislature. Troy, please stand and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students that are no strangers to many of us. We had a fantastic meeting for an hour and a half this morning with the Council of Alberta University Students, many of whom were introduced yesterday by the Premier. They are also looking forward to the estimates debate this afternoon on Innovation and Advanced Education. As I call their names, I would ask that they rise in recognition of their relentless advocacy and continued perseverance to make Alberta's postsecondary education system affordable and accessible and to ensure the highest quality of

education for all Albertans. From the University of Alberta we have Adam Woods, Petros Kusmu, and Navneet Khinda. From the University of Calgary we have Raphael Jacob and Jarett Henry. From the University of Lethbridge we have Shuna Talbot, Sean Glydon, and Chris Hollingsworth. From Mount Royal University we have Sadiq Valliani, Missy Chareka, Erik Queenan, and Seija Roggeveen. The always cheerful executive director of CAUS, Beverly Eastham, joins us as well today. I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, I understand you have two introductions. Is that correct?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed. We'll then hear from Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a born-and-raised Edmontonian who is in this House for the very first time: Mr. Hubert Lau, executive vice-president of Viewtrak Technologies, an Edmonton-based company that's a global leader in livestock information technology solutions, that currently produces the number one pork-grading tool in China and will soon be the number one lamb-grading tool in the world. He is now standing, so I would like to ask my colleagues to give him the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two guests who are helping to enhance and expand Alberta's business and trade ties with the world. I have Ms Sarah Tiet, VP of marketing and operations, and also Mr. Ven Côté, partner and senior adviser with AMCC. Now, Ms Tiet is originally from Asia, and Mr. Côté, originally from Quebec, actually was the recipient of the Ernst & Young entrepreneur of the year award for the prairie region as well as named among *Alberta Venture's* 50 most influential people in 2009. Alberta is most fortunate to have these energetic and dynamic businesspeople helping us to open new markets. I would like to ask my colleagues to give them the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

Mr. Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of mine for the last 20 years, a great supporter of mine, Yusuf Kharadi. He's a journeyman electrician, honest and hard working. He came today to share in the Turkish celebration. He's seated in the members' gallery. I will ask Yusuf to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Speaking Times

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday was a very historic day in this Assembly. Not only was it the first day for Alberta's new Premier, Alberta's 15th Premier, but it was also very noteworthy to hear his very important message delivered at a time called Ministerial Statements, as was it important to hear from other members when everyone spoke about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Your chair knows of the deeply held emotions that are triggered by the subject of residential schools

because I grew up very near to the Alexis reserve, and I saw some of what was talked about yesterday occurring.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission allows and empowers people to tell their stories. In keeping with that theme, yesterday there were some very emotional statements made in this Assembly. As Speaker I was proud to preside over an Assembly, over a Chamber, where, for example, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake was able to stand and tell her personal story involving residential schools. The speeches that were given by other members and by the Leader of the Official Opposition also spoke to many outside these walls who know that their stories have resonance with all of us.

As I mentioned yesterday, at page 351 of *Alberta Hansard* for April 7, 2014, there were some complaints by some members forwarded to me regarding the time that was given by me to members who asked to participate in responding to the ministerial statement. I indicated that I would provide some guidelines with respect to the speaking times for ministerial statements today, including responses to ministerial statements.

In reviewing the background and rulings on this subject over the years, I found the most succinct statement to actually be in a document that I sent to House leaders on January 23, 2014, entitled Proposed Changes to Assembly Procedures: Comments Prepared by Table Officers. To quote from that document, I said the following:

There is nothing in the Standing Orders that provides for the length of time that a Minister may take in delivering a Ministerial Statement. Likewise, there is nothing about the length of responses by the Official Opposition or any other opposition Member. The practice of allowing a Member of the Official Opposition a response of 3 minutes has been followed since the June 13, 1986 ruling by former Speaker David Carter. As there is nothing in that ruling or in the Standing Orders, a further practice has evolved of seeking unanimous consent of the Assembly to have a Member of any other opposition party respond for 3 minutes. In the interests of certainty, House Leaders may wish to consider amending the Standing Orders to either codify the existing practice or modify it.

Some members may recall a ruling I gave on May 14, 2013, at page 2391 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, that dealt with the topic of ministerial statements, especially the length of them.

I also want to point out that one of the most important jobs of the Speaker, although not much is written about it, is to sense the mood of the Assembly and to apply the rules in light of those circumstances. That is what I did yesterday with respect to the speaking times that I allowed in responding to the ministerial statement.

In fact, the Premier spoke for exactly five minutes according to what I've been provided by way of timing. The Leader of the Official Opposition spoke for three minutes and 47 seconds, 47 seconds over the traditional allotted time but well worth it. Same with the Premier: bang on. The leader of the Liberal opposition spoke for three minutes and five seconds. The leader of the NDs spoke for one minute and 54 seconds. The Member for Calgary-Foothills spoke for a minute and 38 seconds. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake spoke for five minutes and 41 seconds. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo spoke for two minutes and 40 seconds. So I granted the appropriate amount of leeway, judging the mood of the House at the time. [some applause] Thank you.

Moving on to another subject, that being the subsequent order of business. Specifically, for those who are participating in Members' Statements, we have a different rule, which is why I enforced the speaking times found in Standing Order 7(4).

Unfortunately, I had to cut off two people at least because they ran over the time, more than two minutes. Members will know that these statements are part of the daily Routine and are not unique. Members know the rules on speaking times and also should know the anxiety caused when one member is seen to be allowed more time than another, which is in direct violation of the rules. I have no choice but to enforce those rules and to try and be as fair and as impartial in my rulings as possible when doing so.

I'm sorry to have taken up a couple of minutes of time from the Assembly on this point, but it was of great concern to me, as it was to some members who wrote to me, sought clarification, and, as I mentioned earlier, even complained. If there are any further questions on this or any other matter, I encourage you to please contact me privately if you wish. Many of you have been in, and we've spoken about numerous items over the past nearly two years. I would welcome you to come in again, and we can pursue the conversation even further.

Thank you for your kind attention and your adherence.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Rural Homelessness

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness anywhere is devastating, but today, colleagues, I want to specifically raise the issue of rural homelessness and encourage our government to ensure that the plight of the people outside of Edmonton and Calgary is also on the agenda. Little is known about rural homelessness, and unfortunately few resources are directed towards addressing this issue. Homelessness in rural Alberta directly contributes to the growing problem in larger centres. The youth emergency shelter society in Edmonton estimates that 40 per cent of their clients come from rural Alberta.

Homelessness in Alberta's rural and remote communities is far less visible than that in the larger cities. People cannot live on the street in a small rural community, and as the situation worsens due to a lack of services, these people often end up in larger centres. This creates a whole new set of problems that increase the likelihood of this individual becoming chronically homeless. This individual is removed from their family and their familiar surroundings and any possible support from their friends and family. They're generally not recognized as homeless until they've been in the city for at least six months and therefore cannot access the necessary supports and services. They become vulnerable to exploitation and the lure of criminal activity as they have no home, money, friends, or resources in the city.

In booming rural communities even the gainfully employed might be homeless as there are often limited housing options and those that are available may be prohibitively expensive. Assisting people to achieve stability in their own rural communities greatly increases their chances for personal success. Without a concerted effort to develop an evidence-based slate of solutions at the policy and program levels, our ability to respond to rural homelessness will be limited.

Let's not forget our often invisible rural homeless.

Government and Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, the town of Sundre needs to dredge in strategic locations to prevent flood damage, but it's not happening. The community of Rocky Mountain House needs a new hospital

and the need grows more acute every passing day, but it's not happening. This winter demand for natural gas has increased 10 per cent and over the five-year average has increased 13 per cent, yet the prices charged to consumers have increased 100 per cent. It makes no sense. Big industry continues to manipulate electricity prices, and when we ask questions, the minister gives completely unrelated answers.

1:50

We now have a new Premier and a new PC leadership race. What does this mean for Albertans? PC leadership contenders are ministers that can't or won't answer straight questions. They claim that an approval to build a sky palace didn't happen even though it did. Another claims that the worst environmental coal mine disaster in Canadian history is safe because mercury and lead might somehow magically dilute in water. They believe that borrowing is not debt and spending over and above revenue is not a deficit.

As the PC leadership candidates set out to repaint the *Titanic*, there's good news for Albertans. There is a government in waiting, a Wildrose government. [interjections] A Wildrose government will prioritize an infrastructure list so that communities can view their projects on a provincial priority basis. A Wildrose government will stop the price gouging in the utility markets and protect consumers. A Wildrose government will develop natural resources in a responsible manner while taking a zero-tolerance approach to irresponsible polluters. A Wildrose government will be responsible with our finances. We will care for our most vulnerable by investing in seniors' care, front-line workers, and front-line services. We will not tolerate discrimination on any level.

You see, Mr. Speaker, a Wildrose government will be responsible, honest, and caring. Thank you very much. [interjections] Albertans have an alternative. [interjections]

The Speaker: I hope that's not the signal of other things to come.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Before we start question period, please be reminded that you have 35 seconds maximum for the question and 35 seconds maximum for the answer and there are no preambles anticipated after question 5.

Let us start with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Wildrose uncovered yet more instances of taxpayer waste at Alberta Health Services. We found out that between April 2012 and September 2013 AHS handed out \$250 million in outside consulting fees for things like fine arts consultation, public image surveys, executive coaching, and even government relations. It seems that AHS can't even get a meeting with the Health minister without hiring outside help. To the minister: wasn't Alberta Health Services created with the express purpose of eliminating this kind of bureaucratic waste?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member took the trouble, she would also have told you that the lion's share of that \$250 million was spent on one-time costs that were directed at consolidating the former nine health regions. These areas include 13 systems related to IT. They include a human resources pay project that was directed at consolidating former payroll systems, reclassifying employee positions, and putting in place the

foundation to run a 100,000 person organization, a \$13 billion budget, and the largest health organization in this country.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. With all the high-priced executives, you'd assume that they had some of this talent internally and wouldn't have to contract it all out.

Last week we learned that Alberta lung cancer patients typically wait twice as long for surgery as opposed to lung cancer patients elsewhere in Canada. With this kind of waste in AHS, is it any wonder? Instead of dollars reaching the front lines to reduce wait times for patients, they're doled out to high-priced consultants to the tune of a quarter billion dollars in 18 months. To the minister: wouldn't \$250 million be better spent treating patients rather than hiring consultants?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the type of uninformed generalization that the hon. member brings forward again and again. As I said, the lion's share of those dollars was related to one-time costs involving very specialized expertise, that brought together nine former health regions and consolidated them in one, achieving great administrative savings in the process. The other thing the hon. member ignores is that today the consulting services budget of Alberta Health Services, as of last December 31, is \$48 million. Those one-time costs have been paid. These dollars are going down as a percentage of total expenditure, exactly the way . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the Health minister didn't hear that this was between 2012 and 2013. The consolidation happened six years ago.

Alberta Health Services has become the enduring symbol of this government's broken promises and wasteful spending. It was formed six years ago, as I mentioned, promising to streamline administration and focus spending on the front lines. The exact opposite has occurred. The bureaucracy has ballooned and so have the wait times. To the Health minister: will he immediately order a review of AHS consulting practices so that more dollars flow through to actually treat patients?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is available to her or any member of this House at any time to ask those sorts of detailed questions. The fact of the matter is that today Alberta Health Services, by any definition, has the lowest administrative costs of any health delivery organization in the country. There is an Audit and Finance Committee that oversees audit activities within AHS. The Auditor General of Alberta or a member of his office regularly attends those meetings. There is tremendous oversight, and as I said, those one-time costs have been dealt with. Today's cost for the same services stands at \$48 million.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues will have more questions for the Health minister later.

Government Communications Budget

Ms Smith: Last week we learned that the government directly employs 214 communications specialists who each earn more than \$107,000 a year on average, for a total annual cost to taxpayers of \$23 million. Almost every week we give examples of damaging

spending cuts that impact real Albertans, cuts that could have been avoided if even some of this money for spin doctors was redirected to front-line services. To the Premier: is he sure that this \$23 million spent on communications specialists is money well spent?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that we're always looking for ways to be more effective in terms of communication and more effective in terms of how we manage the public's resources. But I can also say to the hon. member that it is absolutely inappropriate to describe 214 communications people who help Albertans understand every day how they can get government services, how they can connect with government and get the information that they need – it's really interesting that the opposition has tweeted out that they have five communications officers to support 16 people, and we have 214 who support 27,000 people, who work for Albertans every day.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I had a feeling that the Premier would defend this. After all, he oversaw Human Services with 25 communications staff, to say nothing of the 17 comms staff in Environment and the six comms staff in Tourism. By the way, those comms staff in Tourism make \$122,000 a year on average. If these employees are such great value, then why does the government routinely spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in outside communications consultants across every department every year?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, on an annual basis we have, as I said, about 27,000 people, who work for Albertans, directly employed by government and many, many more who work in government services, boards, agencies, and commissions across the province. We have a budget of about \$42 billion that we're in the process of discussing. Two hundred and fourteen people may be the right number; it may not be the right number. We're going through a results-based budgeting process, and we're looking at everything we're doing to make sure that we're doing the right thing for Albertans, we're doing it in the right way, and we're making the most efficient use and effective use of public resources.

The public wants to know what government is doing. They need to know the information, they need to know how to connect, and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: Well, the Premier may not know whether it's the right number or the wrong number, but I can tell you that Albertans know that it is the wrong number.

Alberta Health employs an incredible 16 communications staff who are making \$121,000 a year. Now, these 16 employees are over and above these scores of communications specialists who work for Alberta Health Services. Mr. Speaker, given that almost all communications are generated by Alberta Health Services, not the Health ministry, can the Health minister please explain what exactly these 16 people do?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the hon. member, but I happen to think that the people that oversee the expenditure of 45 per cent of the provincial budget have a pretty important role when it comes to explaining to Albertans how to access those programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is engaged in the usual tactic of trying to besmirch the reputation and devalue the work of public servants that work very hard both in AHS and my department and, in fact, all of government every day in order to make sure

Albertans have the information they need to access health care. We stand by that, and Albertans stand by that.

2:00

The Speaker: Third main set of questions. The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If you missed it, the Health minister said that he actually doesn't know the answer to that question.

Ministers' Meetings with Industry

Ms Smith: The PC leadership race is under way, and the former Minister of Municipal Affairs has done the right thing and resigned from cabinet to pursue it. It is time to hear from his other ambitious colleagues. The Minister of Infrastructure must know that when he is meeting with construction companies who want to build hospitals and schools, it's unclear if he's doing that as the Minister of Infrastructure or as a PC leadership candidate fishing for donations to his campaign. Will the minister confirm today that he is not seeking the PC leadership, or will he resign from cabinet and stop using taxpayer dollars to campaign?

The Speaker: Well, let's hear from the Minister of Infrastructure. Again, a similar reminder to what I gave yesterday about dancing on the edge of issues that are an internal party position. [interjections] But let's hear from the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say that the hon. member is right about one thing. I have been meeting with members of industry, and in fact they've been pretty productive. On one hand, the opposition complains that they want the 50 new and 70 rehabilitated schools done on time – I'm working very hard with my colleagues here on this side of the House to make that happen – and then they turn around and complain about that happening. [interjections] We're building Alberta. We're having conversations with industry that are actually building those schools. We'll continue to do that. It's the right thing for Albertans. Everywhere I go, people say that they're very happy that we're working with industry. They want those schools. This government does. We're going to deliver.

The Speaker: Are you done? Calgary-Shaw, are you done?
Let us go on to the first supplemental, hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Infrastructure isn't the only cabinet member who is in a potential conflict of interest. The Minister of Energy also hasn't ruled out running for the PC leadership. She must know that when she's meeting with executives from major energy companies, it's unclear if she's doing that as the Minister of Energy, ensuring responsible development of our resources, or as a Premier wannabe looking for corporate donations. [interjections] To the minister: will she confirm today that she's not seeking the PC leadership, or will she resign her position from cabinet and stop campaigning on taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: We have a point of order at 2:02, and now we have another one at 2:03, so we're just going to move on, hon. leader.

Let's go to Edmonton-Meadowlark for your first main set of questions. [interjections]

Mr. Anderson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please have a seat, hon. Member for Airdrie, okay?

Mr. Anderson: I would like a point of clarification, and I would like it right now. [interjections]

The Speaker: I will give it to you later. Let us move on. [interjections]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. [interjections]

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have a right to a point of clarification under our standing orders. I would like it first.

The Speaker: You do, and you will get your point of clarification a little later. Let's move on. Time is ticking, and you're wasting it as you speak. So please be seated, okay? [interjections] Please be seated.

Let us go on to Edmonton-Meadowlark, please.

Flood Recovery Communications Contracts

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kudos to the Wildrose opposition for exposing a quarter billion dollars of wasteful contracts in AHS. We don't need PC spin doctors. The Liberals say that we need family doctors and nurses and real staff.

The gifting of contracts to Navigator, which the Premier said is due to their unique talents, is another prime example of how this PC government wastes taxpayer dollars. After the flood they had ample resources and talent to communicate with Albertans: a Minister of Municipal Affairs, three associate ministers, and 214 highly paid PAB staffers. To the Premier: what unique talents did this PC-insider firm possess that your PC government lacked?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, last June one of the most tragic environmental events in Alberta's history occurred. It was a massive flood that affected many, many thousands of Albertans and changed their lives. This government responded by bringing all hands on deck to ensure that we dealt with the issues that were raised, the concerns that people had, and the responses that they needed. That involved all the people we could muster within the government and those that we needed to hire to bring on in order to handle specific areas of interest and expertise. We do not apologize for responding to the needs of Albertans at a time of crisis in their lives.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the flood happened in June. Navigator's untendered quarter million dollar flood contract wasn't signed until October 28, and it expired on October 31. The only crisis that existed was the Premier's leadership review. The Premier says that this was good business for Albertans. I call it a PC porkfest. One of the very few and very basic tasks set out for Navigator was to submit weekly reports, that we asked the Premier to table two weeks ago, which he failed to do. To the Premier: do you even have these reports, and if so, will you table them today, or is this another Mar-Charlebois affair?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the very question demonstrates why this hon. member is not competent to run a government or anything else. The fact of the matter is – and he would know it if he had ever been in business. He would know that sometimes you have to get on with the job, and that's what this government did in June and July and August and September of last year to help Albertans overcome the most tragic time in their lives. [interjections] The paperwork came, but for him to suggest that the contract didn't start until the paperwork was done is to suggest that he doesn't know how business is done in this province by many, many people. [interjections] I once wrote a contract for a gas plant, and the plant was built . . .

The Speaker: Third and final question, hopefully without interruption.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this Premier was Health minister, a cabinet minister, and now Premier, and health care is still a mess. Yesterday the Premier said that I know nothing about business, that “sometimes you have to get on with the job and do the paperwork later.” But unlike the Premier I am a businessman, not a political lifer, and I can tell you that the PC government is doing business bass-ackwards. It’s no wonder that this government is broke, in debt, and cutting public services. In business you don’t start work without a contract. You don’t give the contract to the first guy that comes along. To the Premier: will you ask the Auditor General to investigate all untendered government contracts to ensure that Albertans are getting the best value for their money?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans deserve to know that that hon. member would stand around until all the paperwork was done before he lifted a finger to help people in need. This government will not do that. This government did not do that. This government rose to the occasion and helped Albertans in need.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Wasn’t that last set a joy, Mr. Speaker?

LGBTQ Student Supports

Mr. Mason: Last night the House voted down a motion that urged the government to introduce legislation requiring school boards to support gay-straight alliances as a means to combat bullying in school. While unanimous Wildrose opposition was predictable, twice as many PC MLAs opposed the motion as supported it: 22 to 11. Mr. Speaker, bullying should be stopped in all schools, not just some. Will the Premier agree to introduce legislation similar to Manitoba’s and Ontario’s in this session and make it a government bill?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the motion last night was a very important discussion to happen in this House, and I applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing it forward. It epitomized one of the issues that we have all the time in this House, and that is competing values. While I think it’s extremely important that our children and youth be supported in having a safe, caring, and respectful environment in their schools, we also believe it’s very important that we have school boards who are tasked with the job under the School Act of making sure that that happens. Two competing values. Sometimes you have to resolve those values and find a way for that to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First sup.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is not a value to allow some school boards to permit bullying to take place. What if you’re a kid in a school where the school board decides to suppress gay-straight alliances and you get bullied as a result? How is that a value that this minister, this Premier, can defend?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it’s absolutely abundantly clear under the School Act and under the new Education Act that each school has to provide a safe, caring, and respectful environment for every child, and it’s the school board’s obligation to make sure that that happens. It is absolutely against the law for people to allow bullying or to promote bullying in our schools.

Mr. Mason: I seem to have united the right, Mr. Speaker.

The unanimous no vote by the Wildrose caucus shows that the lake of fire is still their resort of choice, but had the PC caucus voted differently, this important motion would have passed. Again to the Premier: will he introduce a government bill to support gay-straight alliances in any school where the students want one? Put your bills where your mouth is, Mr. Premier.

2:10

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let’s be very, very clear. We support gay-straight alliances. They do fantastic work. [interjections] The question put to us last night was not: do you support GSAs? It was: do you want to legislate one in every school? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education, would you like to complete your answer please?

Mr. J. Johnson: I don’t think I have anything further to add.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let’s move on, then. No more preambles now. Let’s go to Calgary-Fish Creek.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite an annual management budget of over \$400 million, AHS spends \$460,000 every single day on additional consulting contracts. That’s 38 daily hip surgeries that could have been funded but weren’t, that’s 14 daily bypass surgeries, and that’s 42 daily knee replacements. Instead, the government chose to spend almost \$30,000 on an AHS image and reputation strategy report. Well, Minister, I’m going to give you some free advice. If you want to improve the image and reputation of Alberta Health Services, fund surgery, not consultants. When are you going to start?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear about the information that was obtained by the opposition, in an 18-month period Alberta Health Services spent \$250 million on consulting services, the lion’s share of which were related to the establishment of AHS and the consolidation of systems in the nine former health regions. Today Alberta Health Services, as of December 31, is spending about \$48 million on contracted services. Now, I would be the first to question the same contract that the hon. member just mentioned. As she knows, that contract was let by the former board, and the contract was subsequently cancelled.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I honestly do not know what to say. From ’12 to ’13, Minister, not six years ago. Given that AHS policy on consultant engagement lays out very specific terms and rules on how contracts are to be awarded, who they can be awarded to, and the tendering process that must be followed, can the minister assure this House that all \$250 million worth of consulting contracts follow these rules and were above board in the eyes of Albertans? And I caution you, Minister, in how you answer this one.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the caution that is needed is to the hon. member and her colleagues about how they ask these questions because what they presented earlier today as a news release to now raise in this House as a question of adherence to established policies and procedures with respect to the awarding of contracts is a gross misuse of the information that was obtained

under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This hon. member knows that there are appropriate places to go within the Legislative Assembly, and it's committees to ask these sorts of detailed questions. I challenge her to present those questions to the Public Accounts Committee, to have them answered in public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: They don't answer the questions there either, Minister.

Given that last week we learned that outside of AHS this government already employs over 214 communications staff at an annual cost of \$23 million, will the Minister of Health perhaps consider lending one of the 16 comms staff his ministry employs the next time AHS needs help spinning the government's bad news of the day?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what that question was intended to elicit, so I'll take the opportunity, as the hon. Premier did in answer to an earlier question, to remind the hon. member that those communications officers within the Public Affairs Bureau, that also work within our departments and within agencies like AHS, are there for the purpose of providing information to Albertans about how to access the programs and services that matter to them. If this hon. member doesn't think that those services provided during the flood in her constituency or in other times when Albertans were in need are worth while, then I challenge her to tell that to the members of the public service.

Road Ban Exemption for Grain Transportation

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, it is essential that Alberta farmers have efficient grain transport available to ensure that their products get to the buyers. The government announced an exemption on seasonal road bans for farmers hauling grain to elevators. To the Minister of Transportation. The road bans are in place for a reason. What kind of damage can be expected, and what is the plan for quick repairs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We all know that Alberta farmers have faced a series of challenges getting last year's crop to market, and we want to be able to help them to clear the backlog. It's still too early to know exactly what the impact of easing road ban restrictions for grain trucks will be, but my department is closely monitoring all routes and will use the results from the special permits and will repair any damages that occur. In addition, if a particular route is too susceptible to damage, we'll require alternative routes.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister: what will the province's responsibility be towards the cost of this contemplated road damage, and are municipal roads involved?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, like I said, my department is monitoring these routes closely for damage, and we'll act quickly to make any necessary repairs. The cost of these repairs will come out of Alberta Transportation's highway and road maintenance budget, and it's important to note that we don't expect these costs to be significant.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. This will be to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Has it been established that by lifting this ban, it guarantees that all the grain to be moved actually will be moved?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, there are very few guarantees in life, and I don't think I'd want to go so far as to guarantee that. But it is a really good piece of news, and I want to thank the Minister of Transportation for his role in this because it's very important that all parts of the system work together. We've been encouraging that kind of collaboration, and I think it was important that our government do our part. We've been lobbying hard the federal government for them to do their part, and they are reacting. We'll see how this all goes in terms of guarantees, but it's certainly going to help.

Government Spending

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, we have government ministers flying around on government planes, using government money from the taxpayers to go to government announcements, using government-sponsored communications materials, going around and talking to stakeholders across the province on the taxpayer dime, and there are some people that are worried that doing so if they're also concurrently running a leadership race is a conflict of interest. I would like an answer to this question. Will the Minister of Infrastructure, who may be planning on running for leadership now resign and run his leadership . . .

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you have a point of order. I assume it's on a similar vein to the questions that were asked earlier.

I believe the Minister of Infrastructure already clarified this matter once. I will allow one further clarification from the same minister, and that, I hope, will end it, okay? This is heading more and more into an internal party matter, which is what the leadership is all about. It's not about government business.

So answer the government part of that if you would, please, and proceed.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will assure Albertans that Albertans' work is going to get done. It's getting done now and will continue to get done. We've got 50 new schools to build, 70 to remodel. We're doing planning on a Calgary cancer hospital. We're looking at doing lots of other work. We're looking after 1,600 government buildings. That's the work that Albertans sent us here to do. I and all my colleagues are doing that work every day. The member may be distracted by other things, but I want Albertans to know that this government is actually focused on what's important to Albertans every day, and we're doing that work.

Mr. Anderson: I would note that the former Premier, who just stepped down, did the right thing and resigned. Maybe you shouldn't have stabbed her in the back.

Mr. Speaker, today we've learned that Alberta Health Services has handed out \$250 million to high-brass consultants over the last 18 months. Included in that quarter of a billion dollars is \$3.1 million for things like, quote, communications support, social media campaigns, image and reputation strategies, unquote. To the Minister of Health: why couldn't these things have been done by the dozens of people already employed by AHS?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I'm at a bit of a loss as to how this question follows on the previous question, but here we go. As I said earlier, the vast majority of the dollars spent were one-time expenses that were incurred to purchase very specific expertise that would allow the consolidation of IT systems, payroll systems, and other human resource systems within AHS. Those expenses are certainly reasonable given the scale of the consolidation that occurred, the fact that AHS is the fifth-largest employer in the country, and the fact that it is an organization that spends \$13 billion of the \$42 billion budget of this province.

2:20

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, given that data also show that more than \$600,000 was handed out for executive coaching, which is defined as, quote, stimulation of the client's self-discovery by posing powerful questions that take the form of thought experiments, unquote, Minister, can you explain why taxpayers are paying 600 grand to help high-priced health executives find themselves?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have a similar question about that contract. As the hon. member knows, a number of these contracts were overseen by a previous board at AHS. I don't know the answer to his specific question. What I do know, Mr. Speaker, is that we've taken the steps so that those sorts of contracts will not be seen again in the future. If he has detailed questions about specific contracts, I encourage him to raise them at the appropriate time in Public Accounts.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Caribou Conservation

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Within Whitecourt-St. Anne forest companies have raised issues regarding caribou population in my area. They are currently listed as threatened under the Canada Wildlife Act. Can the minister explain what action he's taking to protect caribou herds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for the question. This is a very important issue to that member; it's a very important issue in my riding of West Yellowhead. We believe that caribou conservation and human activities can occur on the same lands. We're working with stakeholders to create action and range plans to help sustain the caribou populations. So we have 15 range plans that will be developed by the end of 2015, which will protect our herds and also adhere to the federal legislation, so Little Smoky by early 2014, Cold Lake by 2014, northeast caribou range by 2014, and the northwest caribou range by the end of 2015.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the issue does not only impact Alberta, what's the federal government doing to support our provincial efforts right here at home?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to talk to the federal minister about caribou and about some of the plans that our department is looking at to make sure that our herds are

preserved. I can say to you that the federal government is entering into a captive breeding plan for both Jasper and Banff national parks. We're looking at that option, but I do think that we can partner with the federal government to make sure that we have a good program in place. I am concerned that we make sure that the SARA legislation is looked at and that we're resolving problems at home.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The aboriginal community, especially the community in my constituency, can help with this matter. Are they going to be involved in any way in any actions moving forward to help resolve this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again a very important question. I've had very good dialogue with the First Nations and Métis communities across the north, and I feel that there is a real place for First Nations people to be involved in the stewardship of these herds. In my own riding in Grande Cache we have what's called the caribou cowboy program in place, using young people and mentoring them with elders. The program has now been running for two years; it's been federally funded. We've seen great results as far as keeping animals off roadways and reducing poaching and also doing research through the Foothills Research Institute so that we can continue to do this valuable work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Legal Aid Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It is nonsensical to claim, as the minister does, that there is no relationship between the government of Alberta and the Legal Aid Society. The society is enacted by the government and receives the majority of its funding from this government. So to the Minister of Justice: when will the minister stop blaming his federal Conservative cousins for the state of Alberta's Legal Aid Society and get on with it? It's his file. Man up.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Justice department increased funding to Legal Aid last year and will do so again next year. Eighty-two per cent of all funding to Legal Aid comes from our government. This member needs to join with us in asking the federal government, which I personally do support, to give us more money for legal aid. Less than 18 per cent comes from the federal government. It's time for them to improve access to justice like we are doing as a government.

Ms Blakeman: It's not their file.

Back to the same minister: at what point does the minister consider things are serious enough that he will be moved to some action other than blaming the feds? Is it the incarceration of the poor, the mentally ill, and those people on the margins of society?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, last year we gave an injection of \$7 million more to Legal Aid. Alberta Justice is committed to access to justice for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. So far all we've seen is this minister's agreement with the voluntary employee separation program for legal aid and a request from him to cut services. Meanwhile, he gets all-expense-paid trips to FPT meetings to complain about federal funding. When is the minister going to actually take responsibility for this, which is his file, and do something?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the last FPT meeting that we had was in Whitehorse in November. It was not a vacation, and it wasn't a sunny destination. All 10 provinces, the entire governments in Canada, passed a resolution asking the federal government to step up to the plate because legal aid is a joint responsibility between the provinces and the federal government. I sincerely appreciate this member's concern.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Attorney General's answers on this question simply are not good enough. Section 7 of the Charter protects life, liberty, and security of the person. The courts have made it clear that leaving someone without legal representation when they are at risk of incarceration and when the case is complex violates both sections 7 and 11 of the Charter. Now that Legal Aid has decided that not even those who receive AISH due to mental incapacity qualify for help, Alberta's rules on their face violate the Charter. To the Attorney General: why are you allowing your government's disinterest in equal access to justice to violate the life, the liberty . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe it's incumbent upon any of us to give a legal opinion in this Assembly, but I'll remind this member again that 82 per cent of the funding of legal aid comes from the province. That is \$58.8 million. Alberta Justice believes in access to justice for all Albertans, and we are living up to our responsibilities.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, given that yesterday we read about a man who is autistic and receives AISH because it's been determined that he did not have the ability to hold down a job, any job, and given that any reasonable person would then conclude that such a person cannot represent themselves in the courts, why won't this Justice minister act to protect the life, the liberty, and the security of this and other disabled Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice has acted and will continue to act in the interests of all Albertans and access to justice. In 2005 our contribution to legal aid: \$20.2 million. This year: \$58.8 million, over 100 per cent increase. The numbers don't lie, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the number of people not getting help is growing.

To the Attorney General: given that he knows full well that provinces are constitutionally responsible for the administration of justice and that the negligence of his federal friends is simply not an excuse for his own government's intentional neglect, will the minister at least apologize to Albertans for his complete failure to protect the most fundamental and basic legal rights of an ever-growing number of vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I believe that could be a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). [interjections]

Our intent is to support all Albertans, to support access to justice for all Albertans, and that is what we are doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, did I hear you enunciate a point of order as well?

Mr. Denis: That was just in my response, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I could hardly hear it, so I'm just looking for clarification.

Mr. Denis: Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are we ready to move on?

Let us go on, then. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Pembina Institute Funding

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy sector is the economic engine of Alberta and Canada, and we need major pipeline projects to get our oil to market, which is why I was surprised to learn that this government is currently funding political groups that are working to stop the Keystone XL, Northern Gateway, and the Energy East pipelines from getting approved. To the Minister of Energy: should taxpayers be funding antipipeline groups like the Pembina Institute that want to put our energy future at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question, and part of the answer is that the funds that have been going to the Pembina Institute are to do research with regard to carbon capture and storage, also alternative renewable frameworks. Quite frankly, the energy companies also fund the Pembina Institute.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that, on one hand, this government was dealt a major blow last year when the courts ruled against its decision to ban the Pembina Institute from a public hearing and given that, on the other hand, the Pembina received over half a million dollars from various government departments, can the minister explain to taxpayers what is going on?

2:30

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In this government, this Progressive Conservative government, we like to hear from voices all across the province and from everyone. We are open to hearing from the Pembina Institute with regard to carbon capture and storage, the alternative and renewable energy framework. [interjections] We're not going to apologize for getting input from many different places, whether it be the Calgary university, the University of Alberta, or the many different institutions that provide us with very good input into policy.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, taxpayers are asking and are confused. We see the government giving money to Pembina when they like what Pembina says on one issue and then trying to ban Pembina from hearings when they don't like what it says on another issue. Will the minister agree that this government has no business funding any activist organizations?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, that particular member obviously has a problem with freedom of speech. [interjections] But let me

say this. When we have different groups that can provide us with policy input from all spectrums, we look to that, and we're going to continue to do that. We're not going to apologize for that because we end up with better policies when we get to hear from a broad spectrum of Albertans.

The Speaker: Shall we continue with question period? Okay. Let's go Edmonton-McClung, followed by Little Bow.

Public Service Pension Plans

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board recently announced changes to four Alberta public-sector plans: the public service pension plan, PSPP; the management employees pension plan, MEPP; the local authorities pension plan, LAPP; and the special forces pension plan, SFPP. Many in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung are concerned with these changes. To the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board: how can this change possibly benefit Alberta's economic future and public-sector employees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes that have been announced reflect the government's commitment to preserve defined benefit plans and also to get them on a sustainable path so that they're able to keep the promises that have been made both to the current and the future plan holders. We're enacting a contribution rate cap as well to make sure that the plans are affordable both to the taxpayer and to the plan members. Some of these plans cost up to 25 per cent of salaries. That's among the highest rates in Canada. We're planning on giving plan managers better tools to manage their plan.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Alberta's public-sector pension plan is facing unfunded liabilities of \$7.4 billion, what is your ministry's plan to solve this challenge?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, the current unfunded liabilities will be paid down over a period of 12 years. What the changes will do is reduce risk by targeting the cost-of-living increases so that they're paid out when the plans are financially able to do so and by reducing the early retirement subsidies to make the plans more affordable. The government is committed to living within its means, and the changes we're making mean that the public-sector pension plans will be doing exactly the same.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Sure, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will your ministry reduce the risk of unfunded liabilities in the future?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, the changes will help reduce risk and make the plans affordable, as I mentioned, for plan members and for taxpayers. To ensure that the changes have a chance to take effect, we're going to have to put a moratorium on benefit improvements until 2021. This allows the plans to get back on track financially before handing over sponsorship of the plans to employers and labour groups. Those that bear the risks should have the responsibility for how they're governed, and it's why the plans will be jointly sponsored as early as 2016.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Bridge Maintenance and Repair

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March I raised very serious concerns about this government's downloading of bridge files, the cost of maintenance, to the municipalities. The minister confirmed his answer, and it was to "save some money." Some of these bridges are between 50 and 75 years old, and the cost of the repairs is well beyond the allotted MSI fund grants. To the Minister of Transportation: is poor fiscal management the reason this government is passing the buck when it comes to maintaining rural Alberta bridges?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, in tough times we have to make some tough choices over here, but I can assure the member that every rural municipality I've met with in the last four months asked me the same question. Yes, while we zero funded the STIP program in Budget 2013, we increased the basic transportation grant by \$51 million. This money allows the municipalities to spend the money where they see their own priorities fitting.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are 172 bridges located in the MD of Taber, with a replacement value of about \$100 million, and given that in 25 years an average of \$2 million a year to replace the infrastructure will only cover half of it just for this one municipality, what is this government's plan to ensure that municipalities have the necessary funding in proper place to return to rural bridges in rural Alberta? Minister of Municipal Affairs, any thoughts on that?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we find municipalities extremely important partners in maintaining infrastructure, providing for growth in this province, and this year this government, through Municipal Affairs, will give a combined \$1.24 billion in basic municipal transportation grants and MSI in support of that infrastructure, which can go to bridges, to roads, to other infrastructure that's absolutely necessary for continuing to grow our communities.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, they're just downloading the funds back to the municipalities. It's about as plain as it can be.

Who's going to deal with this? The new Premier, by chance? Anybody over there?

The Speaker: The Municipal Affairs minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to work with this group of people because I know everybody on this side of the floor and in these benches is committed to working with our municipalities. They're doing it each and every day. Whether that's helping to repair flood damage, to take care of erosion control so that we can protect infrastructure, or whether it's helping municipalities build brand new infrastructure, schools, and other things, every day we work with municipalities to make sure that we have strong communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Pharmaceutical Information Network

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To continue my inquiries into information and data management programs' costs and outcomes in this province such as the \$83 million for API 3, the \$372 million for AFFRCS, my attention turns to health. The Alberta pharmaceutical information network, e-prescribe, has been going on for 15 years, the implementation plagued by multiple contractors, performance quality and adoption issues. To the Minister of Health: when will this project be completed, delivering on the outcomes intended?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly not agree with the hon. member that the pharmaceutical information network is not a success. It is, in fact, one of the biggest success stories in our health care system. This series of projects began, in fact, in 2009, specifically the e-prescribe product, with the objective of converting from paper to electronic prescriptions for all Alberta pharmacists. Earlier versions of the PIN project began in 2007, notably the V3, and that project . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the project has had a sequence of versions or multiple time frame extensions, can the minister identify the financial impact and the project cost over time?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the PIN project began, as I said, a number of years ago with the goal of moving Alberta from paper to electronic prescriptions. In fact, today a number of initiatives within that project have been successfully completed and implemented across the province. The PIN project is working today with pharmacists on ways to further automate their practice, to connect them in their collaboration with physicians and other providers, working as part of a team. We would expect that this project will continue well into the future with other refinements that connect what goes on in a pharmacy with Alberta Netcare and with the activity . . .

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final sup.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the primary outcome of this information technology project has been to improve cost efficiency and patient safety, how will these outcomes be measured to justify the significant albeit undisclosed expenditure?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The PIN project and all of the other information technology projects that we undertake in Health are not focused on the issue of saving money. They are focused on improving patient outcomes, and most importantly they are focused on improving the experience of our constituents as they interact with the health care system. Medication data is vitally important both in dispensing medication in the pharmacy environment and in guiding the work of nurse practitioners and physicians and other health professionals that work together as part of a team. So the short answer to the hon. member's question is that we certainly will not be measuring this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-East.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Contract

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I asked the Minister of Transportation about the construction schedule of the southwest Calgary ring road, and I thank him for the clarifying letter he sent. Unfortunately, it appears that all the interchanges required to finish the south leg of the road along highway 22X are going to be packaged into a second and larger P3 project, and this will, I quote, provide the most value to Albertans. The sheer size of this massive P3 project will inevitably limit the number of vendors that could even compete for the job. Can the minister explain how limiting the number of proposals will translate into higher value for Albertans?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assume the question was about P3s. We do plan on separating that into two different projects and two different P3 projects because we've done all of our ring road projects so far on P3s. They have to show value for dollars, or we don't accept the contract. We've saved \$2.5 billion using P3 contracts to build the ring roads.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that traffic counts justify action now rather than waiting for the completion of the land transfer agreement and given that smaller projects will attract a more competitive bidding process, providing much more value to taxpayers regardless of if it's another P3, will the minister agree to tender a separate request for proposal for only the south leg along highway 22X?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if I really follow that, but to do a project efficiently, it's better to do it in one project as little pieces along the way. Until we're assured of the land transfer, we wouldn't want to invest any dollars and then not have the deal go through.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What specific evidence does the minister have that suggests taxpayers will receive greater value by completing the final 26-kilometre stretch of this road, all the way from Glenmore Trail down to Macleod Trail in the south, as one project as opposed to two, and will he make the evidence public by tabling it here in this House?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's confusing. I just said that we would do it in two projects, so I'm not sure what he was saying there. We've had great success with P3 projects on the ring roads, and sometimes it's better not to have them too big at one time. That's why we split it into two different projects. One piece of that project is totally in the Tsuu T'ina Nation land, and the other piece is in land that we've already acquired title to, so we could start that project sooner, as soon as we are confident we received that land.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for question period has now elapsed. Could we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to one introduction?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it's an absolute honour today to rise and inform the House that we're joined in the members' gallery by a very passionate advocate for children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, a member of my constituency from the town of High Level. Not only does she serve as a volunteer on the northwest fetal alcohol spectrum disorder network, but she has literally opened her home to care for hundreds of children, opened her heart as well for their care and actually adopted many, many children. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House Mrs. Sonya Schmidt, who I believe is in the gallery up there. I would ask members to give her the warm welcome and the thanks of this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will resume with Members' Statements, starting with Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Writing-on-Stone Park Internship Program

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "When do we get there? When do we get there?" That's what kids say when they are excited about getting to places they know they're going to love. That's what the Writing-on-Stone provincial park staff want of their innovative program in southern Alberta. So what's the big deal? Well, it connects visitors to a unique First Nations cultural experience.

Writing-on-Stone provincial park, also known as Áísínai'pi in Blackfoot – a direct translation meaning "it is pictured" – is an important place for First Nations people, who have visited the spiritually significant landscape for thousands of years. In the summer of 2013 two Blackfoot interns were hired at the park to share their culture and stories with visitors and interacted with more than 4,000 visitors over the summer.

The First Nations interpretation internship program recently won gold in the federal-provincial-territorial category at the Institute of Public Administration of Canada/Deloitte public-sector leadership awards in February, as the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation said, an award that recognizes organizations that have demonstrated outstanding leadership by taking bold steps to improve Canada through advancements in public policy and management.

Congratulations to the staff who joined us here today and were introduced by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. I ask them all to stand again. Congratulations to Juanita Tallman, First Nations interpretation internship supervisor; Suzanne Lodermeier, visitor centre co-ordinator; and, of course, Aaron Domes, head of visitor services, on the success of this program. Thank you for your commitment to preserving our aboriginal cultural heritage and making Writing-on-Stone provincial park a place people can't wait to get to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Open Postsecondary Educational Resources

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to call attention to an announcement made this morning that will directly benefit Alberta postsecondary students. In the last several days and weeks many of us have heard from these students. The Alberta Students' Executive Council held its lobby week with government and opposition members last month, and this week the Council of Alberta University Students also met with many of us to discuss their concerns. That's why our government is pleased today to announce the open educational resources initiative, a new approach to examining educational materials available in our universities, colleges, and technical institutes.

Students have told us they are concerned with the cost of education, and we know that textbooks and other related materials are part of that. Mr. Speaker, this new initiative will bring together leading experts to examine electronic resources, including, potentially, open-source textbooks and e-textbooks, and how our government can work with the institutions to get them into our classrooms. Being able to access their textbooks electronically will mean lower costs for students. There's also the potential to include new teaching tools such as videos and other multimedia products.

Earlier this year student groups in Alberta came together to release Ignite: Ideas for Post-Secondary Education. In their report students called on the government to examine open educational resources, and I'm proud to say that our government is meeting their concerns. This process will be headed by a committee of experts which is already co-chaired by a senior academic leader from Olds College and an international expert professor from Athabasca University. Students and other experts will be added to this committee soon.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes in putting students first in Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

2:50

Sonshine Emergency Shelter

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My statement today will make you uncomfortable, and it should. It's about some of the most vulnerable children and women in our province. I'm going to tell you about the children and mothers who reside at Sonshine Centre, a second-stage women's shelter in Calgary-Currie. The women and their children at Sonshine are there because they are at high risk of serious physical harm or fatality.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homicide in Calgary, approximately 25 per cent. It costs our city \$1.7 million to respond to a single homicide. Now consider this. Sonshine Centre's annual budget is \$1.4 million. That \$1.4 million provides a safe home to approximately 45 families who are at risk for fatality and serious injury. They can stay for up to a year and rebuild their lives. In this context, preventing a single case of domestic homicide has not only far-reaching financial implications, but more importantly the unlimited possibilities of mitigating the effects on our children will have a direct impact on social costs, high school dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, school failure, and psychological disorders.

Ninety-five per cent of Sonshine's families typically arrive from 21-day emergency shelters. It is important to know that emergency shelters are funded by our government whereas Sonshine is privately funded, like all but two second-stage shelters in Alberta. Unfortunately, this means that when a housing unit becomes

available, up to 40 families will be on the list to occupy that one space.

Sonshine has recently developed a children's centre. It is Canada's first licensed and accredited child care centre that offers therapeutic programming and child development strategies and interventions that aim to end the intergenerational cycle of violence in families.

Sylvan Lake Kraft Hockeyville 2014 Award

Mrs. Towle: In 1972 Team Canada beat Russia with Henderson's history-making goal, and 1972 was also the year that Sylvan Lake opened its hockey arena, affectionately known as the Barn. Fast-forward 40 years, and on January 14, 2014, shortly after midnight the Barn's 40-year-old roof collapsed due to heavy snowfall.

News of the Sylvan Lake arena's roof collapse spread across Canada. Kevin Putnam, a Sylvan Lake resident living in Whitehorse, nominated Sylvan Lake for Kraft Hockeyville 2014. Lakers, local communities, and supporters rallied. The town of Bentley's mayor pledged support. The Innisfail Eagles, the town of Innisfail, and the Red Deer Rebels quickly joined in. Community leaders and volunteers took action. Mayor Sean McIntyre and our town council opened the schools and held voting rallies for everyone to support the arena. The community came together. The pride was clear.

On March 8 the top 16 were announced. E-mails of support came from all over Canada. The community grew louder and stronger. On March 22 300 Lakers attended the community centre reveal party, and during the Battle of Alberta hockey game Sylvan Lake was in the top two, with over 1.5 million votes. More votes came in from all over the world: Yukon, Ontario, even from Sylvan Lake residents wintering in Costa Rica, and, of course, Kevin and his crew from Whitehorse. April 5: anticipation, excitement, and the Boom Chucka Boys revved up the crowd as we waited for the announcement. Lakers held their breath. Then loud cheers and tears as Sylvan Lake, with over 5 million votes, became the first western Canada winner of Kraft Hockeyville. Mr. Speaker, this brought over a hundred thousand dollars to the community and a pretty cool hockey game to a small central Alberta town.

Tragedy brings communities together, tragedy can triumph, and Sylvan Lake is a clear example of that. I am proud to be an Albertan, but I'm even prouder to share this experience with my friends and neighbours in Sylvan Lake. On behalf of all Lakers, thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I have 50 more of the over 4,000 postcards our office has received to restore consistent and reliable funding for postsecondary education in Alberta. These were collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association of the University of Alberta. I have the copies here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a publication from the *Stettler Independent* from Mr. Will Verboven, commenting that Alberta is the only province in Canada that does not extend benefits to farm workers – that is,

occupational health and safety and WCB – and on the commitment under Premier Redford to a mandatory extension of those benefits during her term.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the requisite number of copies of the public responses I received via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and telephone in response to my request for information and input regarding Motion 504, which is coming up next week, in regard to increasing penalties and fines to deter excessive speeding and dangerous driving.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe you have two tablings.

Mr. Webber: I do, Mr. Speaker, yes. The first is a collection of three articles regarding the horrific taping of a cat's and a dog's muzzles that happened in Calgary in January of this year. The one article, from the CBC, and the two from the *Calgary Herald* describe the disturbing details of this incredible cruelty. I would like to table the requisite number of copies.

As well, I am tabling five copies of the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' core values and core beliefs, in which they indicate that they will continue to push for improvements and ongoing review of the animal welfare legislation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Little Bow.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the 2009-2012 capital plan and the 2010-2013 capital plan, both of which include the federal building.

I also table the requisite number of copies of the personal web page of the Member for Airdrie. He makes it clear on his page that he was on the Treasury Board during those years. [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite copies of an e-mail I received from Tom Filgas from Lethbridge just going on about how he's not happy about what goes on in the province. He thinks that we should have royalty rates of up to 25 per cent for the oil sands. I'm just passing that forward.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Little Bow – I'm so sorry. Hon. Member for Airdrie, please. [interjection] Hon. Member for Airdrie, please. That's enough. You're just chattering across the bow like there's no end to it. That's enough. If you have a point of order, stand and raise a point of order. Otherwise, zip it up, please.

Calgary – sorry. Little Bow, did you want to finish your tabling, please?

Mr. Donovan: Well, it looks like I'm going to take over Calgary sometime with "Little Bow" and "Calgary" all the time.

I'm just passing that on. I told him I'd table them last fall. I forgot, so I'm making sure I don't forget this time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe we are now going to proceed with points of order. I think we have at least three, plus a clarification which I shall offer after the points of order.

Let's go with the first point of order, which I believe was the Government House Leader at 2:02 p.m. Your point of order and citation, please.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you don't mind, I wouldn't mind dealing with both of the points of order at the same time, at 2:02 and 2:03. They're both relevant as the same point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there were actually three that you raised: one at 2:02, one at 2:03, and, I believe, one at 2:18. I think they were all similarly related. They were all more or less on the same topic.

Mr. Campbell: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'll cite 23(h) and (i) in the standing orders. The Leader of the Official Opposition in her questioning to the Minister of Infrastructure, I believe, was quite deliberate in her attempts to make allegations against another member. I would suggest that the leader actually impugned the integrity of the minister in her questioning, and I would suggest that she also brought the Minister of Energy into her preambles, saying, you know, that the Minister of Energy was also using government business to put forward her bid for the leadership. I look at (h), and I also look at (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member."

I'd also look at *Beauchesne* 409(7) and (8) on page 121. "A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it." Section (8) says, "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again."

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition asked a question. She asked it a second time. You did not allow her to ask it a third time. Again, her motives, I think, were very clear on this. You have made it very clear in this House that – and you've given her, I think, very good leeway in the sense that the opposition has some leeway in asking the questions, but the questions should be about policy. There's no doubt that the questions and the statements from the Leader of the Official Opposition were not about policy. They were about the leadership race. Again, there are no policies within this House that dictate what cabinet ministers should do in running for the leadership race, but I can say that there are policies within cabinet, within the PC Party.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the Official Opposition remove her remarks and apologize to the two ministers involved.

The Speaker: Is anybody responding?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most absurd points of order that has ever been raised in this House. [interjections] I know there are some prospective leadership candidates yelling on the other side. I note that.

This is the exact same line of questioning – the exact same line of questioning – that was put forward in 2011 regarding the leadership aspirations of several cabinet ministers that were out in the media saying that they were thinking of running for leader and so forth. At that time Speaker Kowalski did not breathe one word of exception, one word that it was inappropriate because, in fact, it is appropriate. It's entirely appropriate for several reasons.

First off, there were no allegations against the member. The question was very clear. I have the question in front of me. You will note it in the Blues as such:

The Minister of Infrastructure must know that when he is meeting with construction companies who want to build hospitals and schools, it [can be] unclear if he's doing [so] as the Minister of Infrastructure or as a PC leadership candidate fishing for donations to his campaign. Will the minister confirm today that he is not seeking the PC leadership, or will he resign from cabinet and stop [campaigning on taxpayer dollars]?

It's very clearly a question. It very clearly involves government policy and spending of monies and so forth and deals with a conflict of interest, which we deal with all the time in question period and talk about with regard to government officials, elected and unelected. In absolutely every House in the Westminster system that's how it's done. It's a regular course of business: the ethics of government, conflicts of interest, making sure that there aren't any, making sure that people are accountable if there are. That's our job. It's certainly the job of the Official Opposition leader, and it's our job as opposition.

The second question that he referred to was:

She must know . . .

Speaking of the Minister of Energy.

. . . that when she's meeting with executives from major energy companies, it's unclear if she is doing [so] as the Minister of Energy, ensuring [the] responsible development of our resources, or as a Premier wannabe looking for corporate donations [for her campaign] . . . Will [the minister] confirm today that she's not seeking the PC leadership, or will she resign . . . from cabinet [in order to] stop campaigning on taxpayer dollars?

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, just as with the first one, the Official Opposition leader is permitted under our rules to ask if a minister is in a conflict of interest. And in this case there are a lot of people out there that would say, just as they did in 2011, that there is a fine line that we're worried that cabinet ministers might cross by possibly using resources, obviously government resources, with their kilometres allowance and so forth, et cetera, et cetera, and their access and so forth, and possibly pass that grey zone and start campaigning while on government business. That is definitely a possibility.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to make sure we understand that in this House we give specifically the Official Opposition leader but certainly all members a very clear right of free speech in order to ask questions of the government regarding their dealings. This is not an internal party matter. An internal party matter, of course, would deal with asking questions about the president of the PC Party or a fundraiser campaign that they did or something like that. Those are internal party matters.

As the House leader just said – and this is absolutely critical because he said it just now when he was arguing this point of order. He said that we have rules and policies governing this in the cabinet as well as the PC Party. He just said it in his arguments. So we have every right on this side to discuss whether those regulations are there, if they're being followed, and so forth, and if there's a conflict of interest. There is no point of order, and I don't see any reason why the Official Opposition leader should be withdrawing her remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to use the citations of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I would like to start by referencing the criteria that are

available to us on 503 and 504, which the Speaker has often referenced when cautioning us on questions that involve any kind of a political slant. I would offer that on 503 it talks about how a question should not address “any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities,” and on 504 it talks about questions concerning “internal party matters, or party or election” – one presumes they’re party elections – “expenses.”

Now, that prohibition against discussing internal party business is matched, of course, by what we find on page 93, which are the protections around freedom of speech. So it’s always a balance between the freedom of speech that we enjoy in this House, but the balance of it is to not use it to abuse other members in the House.

We, particularly in the opposition, need the protection of freedom of speech so that we can ask the hard questions, sometimes the uncomfortable questions, and call the government members to account. There is nothing in the House of Commons procedures booklet – and I’ll reference 93 – that prohibits us from asking questions on conflict of interest, as my colleague from Airdrie mentioned. I will quote for you. “Though this is often criticized, the freedom to make allegations which the Member genuinely believes at the time to be true, or at least worthy of investigation, is fundamental.” Further, it says, “There would be no freedom of speech if everything had to be proven true before it were uttered.”

We are in a situation currently which I believe is also a difficulty that is caused for the trust of all of the members in this House. Now, whether any member is seen as deliberately or by omission or even perceived to be using the resources of the LAO or of the government, that puts a blight on all of us. The public doesn’t tend to interpret particular names. They just say that all politicians are doing this. So it matters to all of us that we are able to track this down and get to the bottom of it.

In fact, that’s pretty well understood. I’ll reference the LAO, that goes to great lengths to curb any MLA activity before and during an election to make sure that they’re not making use of any kind of government or LAO resources. Websites are shut down, financial books are taken away, that sort of thing. Clearly, the government understands that there can be a relationship between those two things.

What we are dealing with right now is a case of timing and personal choice, which is uncertain, and that is making it difficult for all of us in this House. The solution, in my humble opinion, is fairly simple. Take a week’s leave as a minister if you are considering this – make the consideration, come back, and do whatever you’re going to do – or resign your seat and go off and do what you’re going to do or state that you’re not going to run for it. But at this point, Mr. Speaker, we are in a period of questioning, with uncertain timing, and all of us want to make sure that no member is disparaged unfairly, nor do we want to see someone that is using those resources when they shouldn’t be.

3:10

So 504 and 503 are really restricting us from asking questions about internal party business. Is somebody running for a table officer position, or who’s going to be the president of the party? You know, that is none of the business of what we’re doing here. But it is very much the business of what we are doing here if we are seeing a situation that could be misconstrued or misunderstood or deliberately put out there that a member is using or abusing government or LAO resources for a particular party function.

I believe that if you look at 503 and 504 and you look at it in conjunction with 93, I would argue that the questions that were asked by the members of the Official Opposition were very much

in order. It would help us all if the hon. members on the other side would make their declarations in favour of or make it clear they’re not going to do this because this uncertain timing is creating the grief that we are all experiencing here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Government House Leader very briefly.

Mr. Campbell: I just want to clarify some comments. I sometimes don’t say the right thing as I’m saying it. It’s not a policy of cabinet that you step down as a minister; it’s been the policy of Premiers that have asked their cabinet ministers to step down if they are going to run. When I was here under Premier Stelmach, he made that request of cabinet, and I know that Minister Hancock has made the same request.

Mr. Speaker, we will expect all of our members on this side of the House, especially our cabinet ministers, to do the right thing if they decide to make that choice. I will make it quite clear that there is no race right now. Nobody has declared. Right now we’re in the process of doing government business, and probably the most important piece of government business is passing the budget.

The Speaker: Briefly, Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, briefly. Just in response, I appreciate the clarification. However, again he just referred to the policy of past Premiers and actually referred to Mr. Stelmach. Of course, we saw what happened with the former Premier, that just resigned. She actually followed that advice and did resign on the Premier’s request because she was pursuing it.

The Premier, of course, is the head of the governing party in our system, the head of the executive. It is very much in order to determine whether those policies protect against conflict of interest and indeed whether ministers are following those policies to protect against conflict of interest. Again, I do believe the House leader is proving that point in some ways more effectively than myself.

The Speaker: Is that it? Okay. Thank you.

I gather we’re dealing with all three points of order from the Government House Leader sort of in one here. I listened as attentively as I could, and I took notes as fast as I could to what you were all saying, and I have the benefit of the Blues. The Government House Leader rose three times today on a point of order and summed it all up under 23(h), (i), and possibly obliquely (j). In any event 23 (h) and (i). Let me just remind you of what Standing Order 23 says. Here’s what it says:

23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker’s opinion, that Member . . .

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

In fact, the Government House Leader rose at that point to call attention of the Speaker to a point of order. Three times. What gave rise to that on one occasion was the Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition directing a question to the Minister of Infrastructure in which she basically suggested he might be “fishing for donations to his campaign.” She then went on to possibly suggest that he “stop using taxpayer dollars to campaign.” In her supplemental she went on to say about the Minister of Infrastructure that he was possibly “in a potential

conflict of interest.” Then she went on to say, “as a Premier wannabe looking for corporate donations,” which she directed again to the Minister of Infrastructure. Finally, in reference to the Minister of Infrastructure she suggested that he should “stop campaigning on taxpayer dollars.”

Now, that’s one, two, three, four – at least four. In fact, somewhere in here she also suggested that he is in “a potential conflict of interest.” So that’s what the Blues are telling us.

Now, this is actually a very serious matter, hon. members, because what we have here are allegations by one hon. member against another member, alleging some of the improprieties that I just enunciated. It should be remembered that in this House we have very specific rules about these kinds of statements not being stated because they do in fact tend to advance false or unavowed motives against another member. In fact, such allegations are often interpreted and, in this case, could easily be interpreted as besmirching the reputation of another member. You could also argue that such comments are disparaging to the personal character of another member. You could also conclude that it was somewhat of a personal attack on another member, and I could go on and on.

In short, you cannot make these kind of allegations in this House. If you have a serious allegation, hon. members, against another member, there are processes in place that you can avail yourself of. I won’t take up your time to review them all for you now. I’ve done it many times before. I would ask you and I would caution you to be very careful of the language you use in this House.

I’m well aware that we’re entering a very sensitive time in provincial politics, and that’s why we like to leave party matters outside the doors. But if you have something that suggests that there is some wrongdoing or, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre stated, that resources given to you by taxpayers through the LAO or through a cabinet ministry are possibly being used inappropriately, there are mechanisms to deal with that, and there are very harsh consequences if that in fact is proven to be the case. But to simply stand here and allege these things, I find offensive and I find inappropriate. I would therefore ask that the leader of the loyal opposition refrain from using that particular train of thought in her future questions, and I would caution all members to do likewise.

We’ve had sufficient clarification of this. If necessary I will pursue it further with the Leader of the Official Opposition, asking her to withdraw those comments and perhaps offer an apology if she so wishes as well – both, in my view, would be appropriate – or if someone on her behalf is prepared to do that now, I’d be prepared to receive it now.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Hmm. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, we have to think about whether civil disobedience is a good idea or not. If this were me, I certainly would not withdraw those comments, but seeing that it is from the leader – and I will protect her – I will on her behalf withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. That would be the honourable thing to do because that then concludes the matter and allows us to move on to the next point.

Point of Clarification

The Speaker: The next point was raised by the hon. Member for Airdrie, and it was with respect to clarification that was sought when I had to intervene and stop a line of questioning which I felt was violating or perhaps about to violate – take your pick – one of the standing rules that we have in this House. In fact, it’s not only in this House; it’s throughout our Commonwealth parliamentary system.

So let me start by referring you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, wherein a discussion, on page 502, with respect to question period says the following: “Furthermore, a question should not . . . create disorder . . . [should not] concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses.” It’s basically the same point that I raised yesterday when a similar line of questioning was being pursued.

There’s also a reference in *Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, on page 122, section 17, where it says, “Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities.”

3:20

Now, during her questions today the hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition said the following: “The PC leadership race is under way.” Then she went on. A little further on she says, “A PC leadership candidate [is] fishing for donations to his campaign.” Then she went on to say, “Will the minister confirm today that he is not seeking the PC leadership?” Then she went on to say, “The Minister of Energy also hasn’t ruled out running for the PC leadership.” And she went on to say about the Minister of Energy, “Will she confirm today that she’s not seeking the PC leadership?” So I count at least five references to an internal party matter, because de facto the race for a leader of the PC Party is an internal party matter. You must be a member of that party to participate in that process. Of course, it’s all about electioneering and campaigning and so on.

There’s a reason, hon. members, that you’ve heard me say before why questions about internal party matters are almost automatically ruled out of order. The reason why is because they always create disorder in the House. I’ve told you before, and I’ll tell you again. One of the first fundamentals that a Speaker must uphold to the best of his or her ability is order and control of the House. It’s absolutely fundamental. Yesterday I was very polite when I mentioned that this line of questioning ought be carefully studied so as to not violate the particular rules that I’ve just mentioned to you, and today we had numerous examples of it being violated. My clarification and my admonishment today to whomever is to not engage in questions that concern party matters. They will be ruled out of order every time. Please, let’s refrain from doing that, and I hope that will close the matter.

We will proceed with the legislative policy committee meetings this afternoon, starting at 3:30. It is with regard to Alberta’s Economic Future, where they will be considering the estimates for Innovation and Advanced Education in committee room A, and Resource Stewardship will consider Municipal Affairs in committee room B. At 7 tonight Families and Communities will consider the estimates of Education in committee room A. That is all in accordance with our rules.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:24 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

Issue 15

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Government Whip
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (Ind)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 58 Wildrose: 17 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

Executive Council

Dave Hancock	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Human Services
Robin Campbell	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta
Rick Fraser	Associate Minister – Public Safety Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Service Alberta
Fred Horne	Minister of Health
Doug Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Sandra Jansen	Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Education, Ministerial Liaison to the Canadian Forces
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Ric McIver	Minister of Infrastructure
Diana McQueen	Minister of Energy
Frank Oberle	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dave Quest	Associate Minister – Seniors
Dave Rodney	Associate Minister – Wellness
Donald Scott	Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation
Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwodzdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Khan
Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Fenske	Young
Hehr	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray and give thanks to those brave men and women who have served in our military defending our rights and freedoms, and let us give thanks also to those who still serve today. Amen.

Hon. members, life, as we all know, is precious, and when it is lost, all of us are impacted. Therefore, on this day I would ask that all Members of our Alberta Legislative Assembly and all others present here with us today as well as those observing our proceedings in their homes join together as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian military personnel lost in service to their country. In a moment of silent thought and prayer let us remember them and be ever thankful to them all. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may we as a nation be eternally grateful. God bless them all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

National Day of Remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge

The Speaker: Hon. members, today, April 9, 2014, marks the 97th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The Canadian victory at Vimy is considered a defining moment in our history, as we would all know. It was the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps attacked together. Accounts of incredible acts of sacrifice and bravery earned Canadians the respect of being a prepared, strong, vibrant, and unstoppable force. Those acts, however, also resulted in over 10,000 Canadians being killed or wounded. Later Brigadier General Arthur Edward Ross famously declared, "In those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation."

Hon. members, four former members of this Assembly are known to have fought at Vimy Ridge as follows. Lieutenant Joseph Emmet Stauffer of the 50th Battalion, Alberta regiment, was killed in action on April 10, 1917. He was the Member for Didsbury from 1909 until his death. He served this Assembly as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees from 1913 to 1916.

Major James Robert Lowery of the 49th Battalion, Edmonton regiment, was severely wounded on April 9, 1917. He served this Assembly as the Member for Alexandra from 1913 to 1921.

Captain Joseph Tweed Shaw of the 46th Battalion, Saskatchewan battalion, was wounded at Vimy Ridge. He would return and subsequently serve this Assembly as the Member for Bow Valley from 1926 to 1930.

Lieutenant Hugh Cragg Farthing of the Canadian Army Service Corps was gassed shortly after the ridge was taken, and it took months for him to recover his health. When he did, he served this Assembly as the Member for Calgary from 1930 to 1935.

With our applause and our thanks let us remember their courage and their achievements. [applause]

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Continuing on my train of thought, hon. members, let me say the following. At Vimy Ridge all 48 battalions of the

Canadian Corps rose as one for the first time in the first Great War. From Alberta the 10th, the 31st, the 49th, and the 50th battalions, Canadian Expeditionary Force, all joined battle, and many were killed and others wounded. Today these four units are perpetuated by the Calgary Highlanders, the South Alberta Light Horse, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and the King's Own Calgary Regiment respectively. The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, while not raised in Alberta, shares the battle honour of Vimy Ridge 1917.

On this special day in my gallery are the contemporary representatives of two well-known Alberta-based regiments who were at Vimy. They are Major Troy Steele, South Alberta Light Horse; Warrant Officer Kevin Heselton and Master Corporal Sean Sullivan, both of Princess. They are here on behalf of the many with whom they serve. Of note, all three have served in Afghanistan and elsewhere on operational tours overseas. The significance of this battle to our dominion is well known to members of this House and to all Albertans. I would now ask the guests I've just named to please rise and receive our sincere thanks. [Standing ovation]

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ken and Iris Saunders, constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud, are fantastic contributors to our community. In fact, they epitomize contribution to community. Tragically, this last week Iris Saunders, who served as the executive director of EmployAbilities, an organization that serves people with disabilities, discusses barriers to employment, assists employers, and acts as a voice of community advocacy, passed away suddenly. She will be mourned by the entire EmployAbilities family and by the broader community. Both Ken and Iris contributed massively to our community. Iris had an indefatigable attitude. She was always there. She was always willing to contribute and always willing to serve.

In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Iris's husband, Ken Saunders, and the Saunders' boys: Ken Jr., Darryl, and Dale. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House, with our thanks for their service. I can tell you that the boys have also followed in the footsteps of their parents and provide great service to our community. We owe an incredible debt of thanks to Iris and a continuing debt of thanks to the Saunders family.

The Speaker: Are there other visitors? The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How serendipitous it is that today I have the special privilege to introduce guests on the very day that we pay tribute to those with courage whose lives were lost at Vimy. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Jean-Christophe Fleury, consul general of the republic of France. The consul general is accompanied by his spouse, Ms Hyunsun Shin. This is Mr. Fleury's first official visit to Alberta since taking up his post as consul general in Vancouver last October. Mr. Fleury has played and will continue to play a valuable role in strengthening the friendship between our jurisdictions.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and France have a long-standing trade, investment, and cultural relationship. Nearly 15 years ago we created the Francophone Secretariat to enhance ties with our Alberta francophone community, a community that consists of

approximately 390,000 Albertans of French descent and over 81,000 francophones who reside in this province today. Together we will continue to work to build on our ties so that our jurisdictions can thrive today, tomorrow, and into the future. I would now ask Consul General Fleury to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly parents of two of our current pages. Firstly, the parents of Stephanie Nedoshytko, who are here to observe Stephanie in her role as a page during her last session here at the Legislature. Joining us today in your gallery is her father, Ihor Nedoshytko, and her mother, Mary Nedoshytko. Ihor is a retired teacher and spends his time playing in various local bands. Mary is a teacher at Holy Family Catholic school. They are both largely involved in the Ukrainian cultural community. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to the members of the Assembly is the parents of Tierra Stokes. Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery is her father, Dave Stokes, and her mother, Brenda Stokes. Dave is a building contractor and an avid hockey player. Brenda is an instructor at NAIT, my alma mater. They are here to observe Tierra in her role as training-development page during her last session here at the Legislature. Tierra leaves us after three years as a page to attend Mount Allison this fall. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. It is with great privilege that I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the committed volunteers who have dedicated themselves to making Alberta a hate-free province. These volunteers are part of the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee, who have been working with the community, government, and police for over a decade to help educate Albertans about hate crimes and a potentially divisive impact on their communities. The goals of this committee are to educate and build communities that work together with coordinated and standardized policies and services to make every Albertan feel included in this great province.

I'd ask each one of them to please rise as I read their name: Chevi Rabbit, this year's Alberta hate crimes youth award winner – I had the privilege of meeting him last year – Laveia Schug, Chevi's mother; Adam Bautista, this year's Alberta hate crimes youth arts award winner; Roger Bautista, Adam's father; Mirande Alexandre; Nicholas Ameyaw; Ayesha Mian; Christine Rapp; Tatiana Wugalter; Sofia Yaqub; Stephen Camp; of course, Dr. Kristopher Wells; Edmonton police superintendent, Kevin Galvin; and Natasha Goudar, also from the Edmonton Police Service. Please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second introduction today is of two constituents from the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Acadia, Sue and Maureen Higgins, daughters of the late Sue Higgins known to many of us as a

member of Calgary city council from '77 to '83 and '86 to 2001. The late Sue Higgins, who passed away on February 16, was also a constituent of mine who I knew. I remember many colourful conversations and the colourful greetings when I met her, knocking at her door in 2007. Leading her legacy, of course, in my constituency is Sue Higgins Arena as well as Sue Higgins dog park. Maureen works with AltaLink, and Sue works for Alberta Health Services. Both of these incredible ladies are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Highwood.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to welcome a school group from Calgary-Glenmore. I would ask the band members from the Calgary Girls' School to please stand. They are joined today by their teachers, Mr. Quan Le, Ms Judy Byrne, Ms Eva Erfle, Ms Jenelee Jones, and Ms Emily Coady. The school has students from across the city of Calgary, and it is a wonderful example of the choice in our education system. Welcome to the Legislature, ladies.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two members of Chinook local 29 of the Alberta Teachers' Association. This local represents approximately 400 teachers employed by Christ the Redeemer Catholic school division, working in schools in Canmore, Okotoks, High River, Drumheller, Strathmore, Brooks, and Oyen as well as the very popular centre for learning online, which services students across the province. Later this year Chinook local 29 will welcome teachers from Clear Water Academy as that school joins their school division. Today the two members representing Chinook local 29 are Joel Windsor, the local staff representative at Notre Dame Collegiate in High River; and Shauna Baillie, the local staff representative at Holy Spirit Academy in High River. Joel has assured me that he's not here wearing his second hat today, which is as a local organizer for the Alberta Party, but I always enjoy our discussions when we do talk about politics. I invite them to please stand and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Marilyn Koren and her daughter Jamie Sullivan. Delonna Sullivan, Jamie's daughter, was seized without an apprehension order and died in foster care six days later, after removal from her home. This Friday is the three-year anniversary of this sad tragedy. Jamie and Marilyn were successful in having the publication ban on saying Delonna's name lifted. In fact, they've been touring the country as advocates for all children in Canada. They're here to be the voice of Delonna and to encourage us to improve the lives of all Alberta children. I would ask Marilyn and Jamie to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by West Yellowhead.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Casey McCarthy. Casey is heavily involved in the Self Advocacy Federation, the Special Olympics, and countless other organizations. Later this month she will be travelling to British Columbia to take part in an autism conference. She's also been invited to take part in the Miss British Columbia Pageant, where she will be the first candidate with autism in the competition's history. I would now like to ask Casey to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and introduce to you and through you a constituent and a good friend of mine from West Yellowhead. Seated in the members' gallery is JoAnn Race from Hinton. JoAnn loves politics and attends every regular and standing council meeting for the town of Hinton, and I know that she keeps the local council on their toes. JoAnn also spent 30 years teaching first aid in the coal mines of Hinton and also working for St. John. She's a dedicated wife and mother and a proud grandmother. She is a great supporter of mine, and she doesn't hesitate to tell me what she thinks. I'd ask JoAnn to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Mill Woods, and that will be it.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Laura McDonald, a Hand Hills resident, mother, and housewife on her first visit to this Chamber. Laura is my Hanna constituency assistant. She is a great community-minded person. Laura was instrumental in the Hand Hills community's reception of a \$50,000 cheque from the UFA's get and give program. Laura, would you please rise and stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you my guests from Ironworkers local 720. Leonard Raboud and George Papineau are both business representatives for local 720, while Coltren Starblanket and Shea Robillard are apprentices. On February 4 the two apprentices along with a larger group of workers were told that they were being replaced by Croatian temporary foreign workers and sent home that same day. Because of considerable public pressure their employer eventually promised to rehire the apprentices; however, to this day many have not been rehired, including Coltren. Coltren is a second-year apprentice still looking to get the hours necessary for his trade. I would now like my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I feel obligated to introduce her again because she's one of my constituents and my boss: Sofia Yaqub. She's a vibrant member of the community

and in lots of women's and seniors' programs. So please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as we've shown over and over again, AHS is a complete shambles. Wait times have never been worse, and every day we learn about new examples of bureaucratic excess. Today we learned that an Alberta Health Services executive vice-president was restructured out of her job, handed almost a million dollars in executive pensions, and hired back the very next day on a sole-source consulting contract, making a quarter of a million dollars a year. Will the Premier admit that AHS is a complete failure?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what I will admit and what every member on the government side of this House will admit is that there are a hundred thousand people in Alberta Health Services who are doing an excellent job every day delivering care to Albertans across this province.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the once again grandiose claims of the hon. Leader of the Opposition the fact of the matter is that from time to time organizations, including government, turn to people with specific and specialized expertise to do a job that cannot be done using internal resources. I don't know the details of this particular contract, but I know that's how . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to provide the Health minister the details. Pam Whitnack, former executive vice-president at AHS, collected almost \$350,000 in executive coaching contracts in an 18-month period. That was after she got her \$853,000 supplementary executive pension. Meanwhile dialysis patients in Athabasca, Red Deer, Brooks, and Lacombe can't get timely access to life-saving treatment. Can the Health minister explain why people who are waiting for necessary treatment have to be second place to executive coaching?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say about being someone who would be on the other side of this House is that it must be wonderful to speculate and to make grandiose claims and to be accountable for absolutely nothing. [interjections].

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the issue is oversight of financial administration within Alberta Health Services, and we have very strong processes that are in place within AHS. We have an Audit and Finance Committee that includes representation from the office of the Auditor General. [interjections] We have a strong internal audit function. We have the tools and the processes in place to be accountable.

The Speaker: Let's listen to the answers, please.

Let's have the question.

Ms Smith: You know who's responsible for absolutely nothing? This Health minister.

From April 2012 until October 2013 AHS spent over \$600,000 on executive coaching for scores of vice-presidents, senior vice-presidents, executive vice-presidents, and executive directors. Meanwhile Alberta seniors were ripped away from their families,

denied baths, and fed horrible food. To the Premier: will he admit that this Health minister is a failure, that AHS is a disaster, and will he do something, anything, to give Albertans some reason to believe that this disgusting mess can actually be fixed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I will say to Albertans is that we have probably the best Health minister we could have in this province, somebody who has a background in health policy, who understands the system and is working hard every day to make sure that system works even better for Albertans.

What I'll also say to Albertans is that I had the opportunity to be at Ronald McDonald House this morning and to talk with families, who were telling me how well the health system worked in their time of need, for their children. We have a health system that works every day for Albertans. These hon. members would suggest that the health system is broken and not working. The reality is that for the most part it works well every day, and we're going to be working hard to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: If that's the best you've got, Premier, that doesn't inspire confidence in Albertans.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

Ms Smith: A few days ago Albertans were treated to the spectacle of two cabinet ministers claiming to have killed the same bad project 14 months apart. Now, Albertans instinctively know that both stories can't be true, but we'll just have to accept that somehow the Premier's penthouse was a zombie that came back to life so that it could be killed twice. So let me start with an easy question to the minister who last killed the sky palace. It's been two weeks since we first found out about this very bad idea. Just how much taxpayer money was wasted on it?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will say to the hon. member that in the same way that sometimes you have to remind the opposition more than once to behave and sometimes, in fairness, you have to remind the government more than once to behave in this House, the same thing actually can happen in a ministry, too. The fact is that we're both telling the truth. I can assure you that the hon. minister is telling the truth. I can assure you that the item was killed in January. They're very infatuated with something that didn't happen. [interjections] I think at some point Albertans would want them to be discussing something that did happen because that's actually in the public interest.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First supplemental, preferably with no interruptions.

Ms Smith: Albertans want to know how an idea as bad as the Premier's sky palace could have gotten as far along as it did, and the minister didn't answer the question. The documents suggest that almost \$200,000 was spent just on the design phases of this project, and no one wants to fess up about how this bad idea got as far as it did. To the Premier: if the Treasury Board isn't carefully watching projects, how do we know that someone else's executive assistant isn't making million-dollar changes to projects after they've already been approved?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Again, without interruption, please.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I took so long correcting the misinformation of the first question that I didn't

actually get to the legitimate part, so I thank you for that part. I've asked my staff to give a number on how much was spent on the planning for what ultimately didn't happen. That's a legitimate question. Thank you for that. It's refreshing.

I can tell you what. This didn't happen. Albertans want to know that. That's part of the process. When we build projects, we kick around different ideas. [interjections] Some of the ideas we kick around don't work. We most often reject bad ideas. This is an example of the system working.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you object to something being said, stand up and raise a point of order. Otherwise, please, no more interjections, no more talking across the bow, all right? I've already had it, and we're only at the five-minute mark.

Hon. leader, you deserve another question.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Still didn't hear an answer in all of that. But the key document about this bad idea was a memo to Peter Watson, the current deputy minister of the cabinet. The memo details the penthouse, the government alumni lounge, and the special elevators to bypass all of the opposition floors. Peter Watson sets the agenda for cabinet, sets the agenda for Treasury Board, and he was fully briefed on this very bad idea. It seems impossible to believe that he didn't tell the cabinet. Why is it that no one in the cabinet had the integrity to do the right thing and say no to this very bad idea?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the member is talking about documents that are made public, and the fact is that change orders don't typically go to cabinet. In fact, you know, if you want to talk about accountability, perhaps the leader could ask the person sitting on her immediate right – I tabled the documents in this House yesterday showing that he was on Treasury Board at least one and possibly two years when this item was discussed – and ask him. The fact is that he would know that not all change orders of projects actually go to Treasury Board. This didn't happen, and that's . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. A point of order is noted, by Airdrie, at approximately 2 o'clock, just now.

Let's go on. The hon. Member for Highwood and Leader of the Opposition for her third and final main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Funny how he got the change orders for our office space but not for the Premier's penthouse.

2:00

Ministers' Activities

Ms Smith: I'm going to ask some careful questions about potential conflicts of interest and seek reassurance for Albertans. The race to choose the next Premier is under way. Many Albertans are concerned that cabinet ministers may end up in apparent conflicts while they undertake their duties to pursue that job. For example, the Energy minister must know that her routine meetings with energy companies will look bad if these companies later donate to her campaign. Will the Energy minister confirm today that she is not in the race to become Premier, or will she resign to prevent the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested that the leader seems to be so focused on leadership. What I'm focused on is getting our budget passed, the legislative session, and

working on the important job that we're doing in Energy. For the last couple of weeks I've met with energy ministers across this country, making sure that we're getting market access across the nation. That is what I am focused on.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Human Services minister has also mused about becoming Premier. Yesterday he rushed out an announcement on changes to children in care even though this was days before the deadline that he'd given to the opposition and others to give him comments about that. The timing has a very unfortunate appearance. Will the Human Services minister confirm today that he is not in the race for Premier, or will he avoid the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars and resign his position from cabinet?

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a point of order by the Government House Leader at 2:02. I suspect it's going to be something to do with the internal party matters, the issue which we discussed on Monday, which we discussed again yesterday. So please be careful of your questions.

Let's have a short answer from the hon. minister and then see where the third one goes.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has a very rather undignified appearance, if the member so wants to know, is that lake-of-fire party over there trying to zig one day, zag the other day. You can't be two things at the same time.

On this side of the House we're working, we're getting things done, and we're protecting everyday Albertans. [interjections]

Mr. Anderson: Point of order. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. Member for Airdrie. [interjections] Hon. Member for Airdrie. [interjections] Airdrie. Hon. Member for Airdrie, hon. Minister of Human Services, please look at me. This way. Okay? All right.

Hon. members, you can see why there is a specific rule, a citation, in fact, in two different parliamentary books that specifically forbids, discourages, and otherwise counsels members to not use question period to raise issues of an internal party nature. Part of the reason is because on many occasions, in fact most occasions, it results in what you've just seen so far, three points of order and then some bantering across the bow, the Human Services minister with the Member for Airdrie and then Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, louder than not, perhaps others, and I expect that there might be some on the government side.

Let's be reminded what these rules are. Otherwise, I'm going to have to intervene, and unfortunately the clock will be eaten up accordingly. The choice is yours. It's not my rule, hon. members. It's your rule.

Now let's go on with the final supplemental.

Ministers' Activities

(continued)

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education minister, that comment was directed at you, too.

That brings me to the Minister of Justice. He also indicated that he'd like to become Premier. He even tried to throw the Finance minister under the bus. [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, it's hard to hear what the question is when you're persisting to talk during your own leader's question. Please. I've asked you kindly. I may not be so kind on another occasion. Let's give the floor to your leader. She's earned the right for this question, and we've all earned the right to hear it.

Hon. leader, would you please give us your question again?

Ministers' Activities

(continued)

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all saw how quickly the Justice minister reversed his cuts to the GPS monitoring program at least for the next six months, until the next Premier is chosen. Will the Justice minister confirm today that he is not in the race for Premier, or will he avoid the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars and resign his position from cabinet?

Mr. Denis: I first rise on a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I think this will be the last of them, so I invite you to offer a brief answer, and then let's move on.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Access to justice, safe streets, safe communities, the government business, Mr. Speaker: that is my priority. It's time that we stopped talking about party matters in this manner in this House and stick to the business of the government.

I also have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, that is the fourth point of order.

Let us go on with Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition.

LGBTQ Student Supports

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gay-straight alliances are student-led organizations that provide a safe environment for LGBTQ youth and their straight allies. On Monday this PC government had a chance to shed its shameful, homophobic legacy by supporting Motion 503. Instead, 22 PC members caused the defeat of the motion by voting against human rights and respect for LGBTQ youth. It seems like the bigger lake of fire is over there. The Premier said he would have voted for Motion 503, but he didn't. I was there, the only leader who voted for this, as did all the Liberal MLAs. To the Premier: why didn't you lead your caucus by example and ensure that the motion passed?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last time I checked, Monday afternoon is private members' business, and in private members' business the tradition of the House is to have private members debate private members' motions and vote as private members on those motions. Sometimes when a motion is totally egregious, against government policy, members are encouraged to consider government policy when they vote. But private members' business is private members' business, and members are encouraged to debate issues fully, sometimes with competing values, as this one was, and then come to a conclusion and vote.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this particular issue was not important to this Premier.

Human rights are universal, not local and not up to the whim of some school board official or principal. What's required here is leadership. Alberta students support gay-straight alliances. The Alberta Teachers' Association supports them. The mayor of Edmonton supports them. But the Minister of Education himself stood up and voted against gay-straight alliances. Mr. Speaker, the credibility of a welcoming and inclusive province is at stake. To the Premier: it seems like you're leading the regressive conservatives. Will you show leadership by bringing in legislation this session and . . .

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the comments that this member has made against our Premier are absolutely ridiculous and insulting. When you're trying to talk about being respectful and caring and welcoming and inclusionary and then make comments like that, you completely defeat the purpose of the spirit of this.

This government and myself and this Premier absolutely, one hundred per cent support GSAs. They're fantastic organizations. We put policies and resources in place to support students and to support schools that do that. This member doesn't trust schools, he doesn't trust teachers, he doesn't trust principals, he doesn't trust our school board trustees, who are duly elected . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Final supplemental.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the credibility of this very minister is at stake, who's charged with protecting Alberta's children in the schools. The evidence clearly shows that in schools that have had GSAs for three years or longer, discrimination, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts are less than half compared to other schools. We're talking about saving and improving the lives of children. The Premier wears a Children First pin. I have to think that this would be important to him. To the Premier: time to decide. Are you a placeholder Premier or a real Premier who puts children first by standing up to the homophobes in your caucus . . .

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely reprehensible for that hon. member to accuse members on this side or any side of the House of being homophobic. I would ask that hon. member to put his record up against mine in terms of putting children first. [interjections] There is no one in this House who has a better record for standing up for children than this hon. member and this Premier, who will use the office of Premier in an appropriate way to do appropriate things at appropriate times because Alberta is not standing still.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:10

Speaker's Ruling Repetition

The Speaker: Hon. members, sometimes comments like we've just heard from both sides can be interpreted as attacks on a person's character. They don't belong here. I was surprised there wasn't a point of order, and then suddenly Airdrie did rise on a point of order. That was noted at 2:09 p.m.

While I'm on my feet, could I just also please remind all members of our own Standing Order 23(c), that says:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(c) persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session.

So please be reminded of what has been decided and how our rules state it should be abided to.

Let us go on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, leader of the ND opposition.

Fort Chipewyan Cancer Incidence

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the government and the Wildrose debate waste and contracts and so on, there are some serious health issues that are being ignored. This government has ignored the warnings of scientific experts who have alerted us to the negative health and environmental effects downriver from Fort McMurray. Doctors have asked for a decade now for a full investigation into elevated cancer rates, yet the government has still not bothered to study the risk factors and how they're contributing to cancer rates. To the Premier: will this government commit to a full study of the links between substances released by industry into our environment and the cancer outbreaks in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member, I hope, is aware, the Alberta cancer registry does conduct very rigorous surveillance of the incidence of cancer across the province, including some very specialized local studies including Fort Chipewyan. As the hon. member knows, the results that were released a few weeks ago did show higher-than-expected rates of specific types of cancer – namely, lung cancer, cervical cancer, and bile duct cancer – in that community. But as the hon. member should also know, the chief medical officer of health has laid out a plan, which he is hoping to have the opportunity to discuss with the community, to address risk factors.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, those sorts of statistical analyses do not do anything for the people in Fort Chipewyan. It's their health that needs to be studied and the link between their health and pollution caused by industry farther upstream. So will the Health minister commit to a clear, comprehensive study of the link between emissions and pollution upstream of Fort Chipewyan and the clusters of cancers that have been found there?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I will agree with the hon. member in that it is their health; it is the health of the people that live in those communities that we are talking about here today. But where we will disagree – and I think the chief medical officer made it quite clear – is that there are a number of known risk factors for all three types of cancer that have been identified, that are in fact risk factors anywhere in Alberta: smoking as it relates to lung cancer; lack of access to the human papilloma virus vaccine in the case of cervical cancer; and a number of causes, including diabetes and other chronic diseases related to all three types of cancer. Mr. Speaker, the chief medical officer is committed to working with the community to address these risk factors and to discuss . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government has a long history of attempting to ignore and wish away impacts on our water, on our environment, and on human health as a result of oil sands development. There's a long, long record of that. You do it over and over again. The minister is doing it again. He's talking about lung cancer. He's talking about smoking. These are clusters particular to this area. People smoke all over the province, Mr. Minister, not just in Fort Chipewyan. What's your answer?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, my answer is the same answer that was given by the chief medical officer when he released the results of this and talked about what we're going to do. I'm sure that neither the hon. member nor I would want us to think that we're presenting ourselves to Albertans as scientific experts. What we do know is that for all three types of cancer that we're discussing here, there are known risk factors that exist all over the province. Very thankfully, the results this year did not indicate any increase in the prevalence of childhood cancer. As the chief medical officer has said, he's more than willing to sit down and talk to the community about measures that can be taken.

The Speaker: Thank you.

From here on no more preambles to supplementals.

Let's go with Calgary-Foothills, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October last year Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, was passed. It was passed unanimously in this House, and it was granted royal assent immediately thereafter, but seven months later I have yet to hear of any development of the organ and tissue donation agency. My question is to the Minister of Health. What is the status of the implementation of this bill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm pleased that the hon. member asked the question because later this month we will be unveiling the online registry for organ and tissue donation in Alberta, and at that time all Albertans will have the opportunity to easily and conveniently register their intent to donate. That information will be stored in a database, the organ and donor registry database, maintained by my ministry and made available in care settings across the province when situations arise where an organ or tissue might be made available.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Webber: Thank you. Hon. minister, that's fantastic news, and I appreciate all the work you've done on this and on the registry. But I do want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, given that the key element of the development of this bill is the actual agency, that the registry you just announced is a small portion of this agency. I guess my question is: where are we, Mr. Minister, with the agency?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the key element is making it easy and convenient for Albertans to register their intent to donate organs and tissue, and that step, as I said, is being addressed this month. Later this spring we will see the same opportunity to register the intent to donate made available when

people renew their drivers' licences and their personal identification cards. The agency that the hon. member refers to is in the process of being developed. This is the agency that will oversee both donation activities and transplantation activities in the province, co-ordinating public awareness and education, and we expect the beginnings of that agency to be in place later this year.

Mr. Webber: Fantastic news, Mr. Minister. Thank you very much for that.

Given the fact that there is an average of four people a week that are dying in hospital beds waiting for these organs, can the Minister of Health speed up the process at all with respect to the development of this agency because of the fact that so many people are on their deathbed?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything we can to accelerate the commitments. Again, the agency is going to serve a co-ordination role and an administrative and public education role within the province, but the immediate issue in Alberta is making it easier and more convenient for people to register their intent to donate. That is actually the key to increasing the rate of donation and increasing the number of opportunities that our doctors and nurses and other health professionals have to harvest organs and tissues that have been made available by their fellow Albertans. That is our immediate focus, and we'll of course be following through on all of the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the \$250 million in AHS contracts are \$600,000 in executive coaching fees. Over half of these dollars went to a recently departed AHS VP. We have another document that shows that a sole-source contract worth a quarter of a million dollars was handed to this individual the day after she left the job with AHS. According to your policy sole sourcing shall only be permitted when there is a legitimate need, typically when an unforeseeable situation of urgency exists. Can the minister tell us how an executive coaching contract could ever be considered an urgent priority?

Mr. Horne: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the news release that was blurted out, so to speak, by the opposition shortly before question period, I'm not at all sure that the facts represented in that release are correct, so I have already been in contact with the official administrator of Alberta Health Services to determine that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. There are actually rules and processes, including an internal audit function, that oversee the transactions that take place in AHS with respect to consultants and other procurement, just as there is in government. As minister I expect those to be followed. We presume that they are followed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, first of all, they're FOIP documents, so let's just talk about your processes. Given that AHS policy states, "All

sole sourced Consultant engagements valued at greater than \$25,000 will periodically be reviewed by Senior Executive to evaluate compliance with this policy,” can the minister assure Albertans and table evidence that this policy was followed in that case?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we discussed this issue yesterday. It is very easy for any member of this House to stand up and to loosely connect facts, whether or not they were acquired through FOIP, and to attempt to lead or mislead, as the case may be, people to a conclusion that may or may not be correct. In this instance there are clear processes within Alberta Health Services, including an Audit and Finance Committee, that includes representation from the office of the Auditor General, that is charged with overseeing these sorts of transactions.

I cannot say with respect to the specific transaction exactly what oversight was exercised, but, Mr. Speaker, we . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Mrs. Forsyth: I’ll tell you that it’s not me that’s misleading the House, Mr. Speaker.

Given that AHS policy forbids consulting contracts for salaried employees and given that this individual received a contract the day after leaving AHS, how can Albertans believe that the \$250,000 untendered executive coaching contract was anything but a deliberate attempt to reward a senior official with taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member has no regard for the reputation of the individual who received this contract or perhaps anyone else, and that wouldn’t be surprising because this kind of negativity, cynicism, and personal attack is exactly what we’ve observed from across the aisle for the last two and a half years.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that we do take the rules and procedures that we have seriously. We set up oversight mechanisms, we hold people to account, including in this case the official administrator of Alberta Health Services, we presume compliance, and when there is not compliance, we take appropriate action.

Bighorn Sheep Harvest

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the bighorn sheep is an iconic Alberta symbol. Stakeholders have concerns over the serious decline in the quality and quantity of trophy bighorn rams available for harvest. The ESRD assessment indicates that harvest levels need to be adjusted to bring them in line with the management plan. My questions are all for the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister consider longer waiting periods of at least five years after harvest or, better still, introduce a limit of one trophy bighorn harvest in a lifetime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for the question. As an avid hunter and outdoorsman I know he understands the importance of making sure that we have sustainable herds in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, hunting is a long-standing tradition in Alberta, and we are going to work with our department and discuss with stakeholders about different ways to reduce the number of bighorn

sheep that are being harvested. Longer waiting periods and limits on harvesting of trophy rams are among some of those options that are being discussed, and we hope to have those new regs out for this fall.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the House on what measures are being taken to actually increase the habitat for bighorn sheep in Alberta?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, thank you for the question. ESRD is working with Parks Canada and other stakeholders along the eastern slopes, and we’re looking at prescribed burn areas in the mountain areas that will provide sheep habitat. These prescribed burns remove some of the forest cover that is encroaching on winter range, and it turns it back into useful winter range for bighorn sheep.

Not only do we do prescribed burns to help increase habitat, but they also support a program for managing mountain pine beetle. Also, Mr. Speaker, I’d say to you that along the eastern slopes and with the reclamation of the coal mines we have some of the largest bighorn sheep herds in North America. They’re flourishing, and we’re using them to export sheep to other parts of North America.

Dr. Brown: Finally, can the minister advise the House why we are continuing to capture and export bighorn sheep from the province when there is ostensibly a shortage?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would disagree with the member’s comments that there is a shortage of bighorn sheep in the province. I mean, I would suggest that there are some concerns about trophy rams, and we will address that, but our population is very stable. We have had very good success, again, from the sheep herds at the Cardinal River and Gregg River mines. We have shipped sheep to Wyoming, to Montana. We just had a capture here – I believe it was in January – where we shipped ewes and young rams to North Dakota. We will continue to make sure that our herds are sustainable and make sure that they continue to be healthy.

Health Care Spending

Mrs. Towle: Red Deer’s dialysis unit is now at capacity, and clients who require dialysis rely on it for their life. Dialysis is also a core service of Alberta Health Services. In Red Deer dialysis patients are travelling elsewhere two to three hours a day, three to four days a week to get life-saving treatment. Unfortunately, the Red Deer-South MLA and the Health minister don’t think dialysis in Alberta is as big of a deal as a premierial sky palace. How does this government continue to prioritize rooftops and swanky sky palaces over life-saving dialysis treatment?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to tell the House that both the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and his colleague the MLA for Red Deer-North do an excellent job of representing their own constituents in a fair and objective way and do not present their constituents’ concerns in the context of such ridiculous analogies as we’ve just heard.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the demand for dialysis is growing across the province. The incidence of renal failure and the incidence of renal cancer are increasing commensurate with the increase in other chronic diseases. Red Deer is one of the fastest growing areas of the province. We are looking at ways to expand . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Towle: It's unfortunate that the Member for Red Deer-South didn't speak up when you were talking about all of those extra expenses in the sky palace and explain the situation in Red Deer.

Given that this government decided in 2013 to spend \$600,000 on fancy New Age, mind-altering courses for Alberta Health Services executives, how does the Health minister honestly tell Albertans that the priorities of this government are executive coaching, million-dollar severances, and soft landings instead of life-saving dialysis treatments?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly the sort of illogical and incomprehensible rhetoric that does a disservice to the very serious issues that we're dealing with in delivering health care in Alberta. The opportunity cost decisions in health care are at a level they have never been at before in Canada. We are dealing with the need to expand primary health care, we're dealing with higher incidences of cancer, we need to keep up with new technology and new drugs, and we need most urgently to deal with the challenges posed by the growing incidence of chronic disease like renal disease. Those are the levels of discussions that we have on this side of the House.

Mrs. Towle: It's interesting that the minister could foresee that all his executives needed extra coaching but couldn't foresee that Red Deer residents might need some dialysis.

Given that in 2012 – in 2012, Minister – Alberta Health Services spent \$460,000 a day on these outside consultants, doesn't the Health minister know that he is fully responsible for the decisions made under his watch at Alberta Health Services that continue to prioritize executives before life-saving dialysis treatment for Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I know is that this government understands that the health care system is about people and their families and communities. It's not about cheap political rhetoric. It is not about demeaning, besmirching the reputations of people.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I know is that we've cleaned up executive compensation in Alberta Health Services, we have cleaned up the issue around travel and expenditure, and we have reduced the number of vice-presidents in that organization from 80 to 10. I don't know of a leaner \$13 billion organization in this country or in North America, and we're very proud of what's been achieved at Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Cancer Incidence and Treatment

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 10 years cancer concerns have been identified in Fort Chip. In 2009 the Minister of Health along with the federal government committed to a multiyear longitudinal health study with over a million dollars. The cancer update last month by his department again confirmed the cluster of biliary tract cancers along with lung and cervical cancers in Fort Chip. Small wonder that their trust and the trust of our American neighbours in this government is being threatened. To the minister. The world is watching. Given the five years since the announcement of this health study what are the results? When will the residents of Fort Chip see any . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the residents of Fort Chipewyan know that this government takes their health and their health concerns extremely seriously. That is why since 2009 the chief medical officer of health of this province has overseen studies such as the Alberta cancer registry surveillance study, that reports each year on the incidence of cancer in that region and across the province. I would be the first to agree with the hon. member that the community needs to be involved in this discussion. That's exactly what we've been attempting to do for some time. In fact, the results of the study were released before we could arrange that meeting with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has totally ignored the question of the million-dollar commitment to a health study for which we've seen no results. When are we going to see the cancer cluster investigated – that's been on the books for at least five years and recognized – in a separate investigation?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the investigation that has been conducted is exactly what the hon. member is asking for. We have identified higher than expected rates of cancer in this community as compared to other parts of the province. We know exactly what types of cancer are involved. The chief medical officer of health has spoken very specifically to what the risk factors are for those types of cancer and how he is willing to work with the community to address those. Those are hard, focused efforts to improve the health and health outcomes of people in the community, and I know that the chief medical officer is anxious for the opportunity to talk with the community about that.

2:30

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2011 reported that Alberta has the lowest survival for lung cancer in the country. CIHI this year reported Alberta dead last in waiting times, three months for lung cancer surgery. That's three months of further growth and spread. Mr. Minister, what are you doing about this long wait-list for cancer?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned by the last Canadian Institute for Health Information report specifically as it relates to lung cancer. I've discussed the issue with Alberta Health Services. I understand that there are a number of factors involved. Is their performance good enough? Absolutely not. I know that AHS has put a lot of effort into addressing the preoperative assessment process and speeding that up by doing things in tandem as opposed to in a linear fashion. The bottleneck seems to be the number of people that are ready to be treated and need access and need to get that access to surgery quicker.

LGBTQ Student Supports

(continued)

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, on Monday in this House we debated a very serious motion, Motion 503, which allows students to form gay-straight alliances in their schools. These clubs are proven to reduce bullying, encourage understanding, and build truly inclusive school communities. Unfortunately, the Wildrose opposition and 22 members of the PC Party, including the Minister of Education, voted against the motion. To the Minister of Education: will you do the right thing and introduce legislation allowing students to form GSAs in their schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the legislation exists and the policies exist already for students to start up GSAs. Like I said before, we support them. The motion on Monday was not about allowing students to start up GSAs. It was about imposing legislation broadly across the province removing the right of school boards and trustees to set those policies and make those decisions. This member would like us to throw trustees and school boards under the bus. They're duly elected officials. If this is truly an issue, we can deal with it if that can be proven.

Speaker's Ruling Items Previously Decided

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's be reminded that Motion 503, as far as I know, has been decided by the House and our rule under Standing Order 23 says, "a Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . . raises matters that have been decided during the current session." So figure out another way to get your question asked is all I'm saying. Okay? [interjections] I don't need any coaching, Edmonton-Centre and Calgary-Buffalo. Truly, I don't.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, let's hear your first sup.

LGBTQ Student Supports (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about future legislation.

Given that school boards should not be allowed to deprive students of the right to use a proven, effective tool to combat bullying in our schools and given that all minority rights need to be protected, will the minister recognize that the new Education Act does nothing to protect students' rights to form a GCA, and will he commit to taking action, and if not, why not?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, they're GSAs. I know that he just made a mistake, but they're GSAs. There are all kinds of really valuable and really productive groups, support groups, initiatives, antibullying initiatives, and programs that are out there. [interjections] School boards and trustees and principals and administrators in those local schools decide which groups, which clubs, which initiatives, which programs are going to work best in their school, with the issues that they have, [interjections] with the resources and the people that they have, and we think that that's the best place to leave this decision. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I wonder if we could proceed with your final supplemental. Did you ask it already?

Mr. Bilous: No; I have one more. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I thought you were wanting to address the House.

The Speaker: There was so much distraction here. You had Edmonton-Strathcona jumping in there, you had Edmonton-Centre jumping in there, and it was just hard to hear. But go ahead with your final sup.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the last comment, Mr. Minister, your own antibullying minister knows that it's not good enough and voted in favour of this motion.

Given that this PC government made a show of raising the pride flag to support LGBTQ rights in Russia and given that back in Alberta the rights of LGBTQ kids don't even extend to forming a club in order to stop bullying, back to the same minister: why will

you raise the pride flag during the Olympics but won't raise the standard of protecting kids from bullying?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we take this very seriously, and we are raising the standards against bullying. There are all kinds of investments and resources to that end. I would point to the fact that we have a minister, who is doing a great job, of Family and Community Safety as more evidence of that. GSAs are fantastic. They do great work. But there are a lot of other groups that do great work, and every time we come across a group that does great work and that we think should be in all the schools, we don't legislate them into every school in the province. That was the question that was put to us on Monday, not whether we support GSAs. Of course we support GSAs. We just don't think the Legislature is the best place to make the decision on which . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Gas Prices

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently some Alberta consumers have been shocked with gas heating bills that have more than doubled. Demand increased this past winter, but what is troubling is the fact that the fuel price, natural gas, has doubled. Why are consumers getting gouged, and will this government investigate the market for price-gouging?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question, a question that many Albertans are asking as well. It really does relate to the markets. As well, when we look across the Alberta, Canadian, North American markets, the amount of cooling this year, with regard to that the gas prices are high up. It is a market-based system but one that we always keep a close eye on as well. It's important. We've seen this across North America, and we always work hard to make sure that we're paying close attention to this file.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. Let's pay close attention.

Given this winter's demand for natural gas only increased 10 per cent over last year and given this winter's demand for gas only increased 13 per cent over the five-year average and given we started the winter with record-breaking natural gas reserves, 8 per cent more than the five-year average, why did the retail price for natural gas increase 100 per cent, and how is this justified?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I did say in my opening comments, this has been the coldest winter that we've experienced in a long time. The prices of natural gas in January, February, and March were due to this unusually cold winter, not just here in Alberta but throughout North America. When you have that happen, you have a low inventory. [interjections] When there's a low inventory, prices go up.

Mr. Anglin: A record-breaking inventory isn't a low inventory.

Given consumer gas heating bills are averaged over a 12-month period and given the 12-month average price of the wholesale market is \$4.51 and given the five-year average price of wholesale natural gas is \$4, can this government explain to hard-working Albertans why the average retail price has doubled and the average wholesale price only increased 13 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of 2014 we saw the gas prices at \$7.383. In February they were at \$4.86. [interjections] The rates have actually already come down for April. Under Direct Energy in the north we see \$5.18. In the south we see \$4.26, and with AltaGas it's \$6.38 per gigajoule. We see that this month. We saw a cold January, February, and March, and that's exactly why you saw the prices increase. They're now coming down. [interjection]

The Speaker: I don't know if the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre have finished their conversation.

Assuming they have, let us move on to Lesser Slave Lake.

2:40

Gift Lake School

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A sudden closure of the Northland school division's Gift Lake school resulted in a shutdown due to extensive black mould, displacing 757 students. These students have been forced to get their education at various locations as well as in many communities miles away. On a daily basis I hear my constituents voice their concerns over the scheduled December 2014 completion date of the new Gift Lake school. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that we are getting a beautiful school in Gift Lake and that it is being built slowly, in my view, and taking into consideration the mould issue, can your department somehow expedite the building process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the member for advocating. As you know, the health and safety of Albertan students and Albertan kids is of the highest importance. The hon. member is right in saying that we are struggling with the schedule for this particular school. Getting rid of the mould has been a struggle. Also, we're pulling together Northern Lakes College and two other organizations in a partnership to try to make sure we do this the best way that we can. I would say to the member that the people in Alberta Infrastructure are working very hard to get it done, but we're not finished.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First sup.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure my constituents will be very happy.

To the Minister of Education: given that modulars were promised to Gift Lake to ensure displaced students have an appropriate learning space, why is it taking so doggone long to do that?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I would echo my colleague's comments that this MLA has been an incredible advocate for her community. But I can say that there has been a great deal of work done to make sure that the site at the Gift Lake community centre is both properly prepared and ready to accommodate these students, and we anticipate that they'll be ready for occupancy in May. In the meantime there's been excellent collaboration, I understand, between Whitefish Lake First Nation band council and the Northland school division to accommodate the Gift Lake students and staff at the Atikameg school. So Gift Lake students and staff are now fully accommodated at the Atikameg school,

and I'm assured that they have a good learning environment there until . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: given that we have often been accused of being slow in our efforts to enhance aboriginal education throughout Alberta, what are you doing to ensure First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are getting the opportunity they deserve, given the fact that they have circumstances like this?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a great point. One of the things we focus on is equitable access to opportunities for all our kids across the province. I know the Minister of Aboriginal Relations has worked very hard on this as well. One of the things that's happening is that the MOU between the First Nations in Alberta and the provincial government and the federal government has been progressing quite nicely, and a number of initiatives have come out of that. With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was just hosted, the last conference here in Alberta, our Premier and our minister made comments there, commitments that all kindergarten to grade 12 students are going to learn curriculum about treaties and about residential schools. That is just the start of some of the many great . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we had five points of order in the space of about 10 or 12 minutes. Over the next few days I'll be approaching all four caucuses as well as independent members to chat about coming to your caucus for a brief chat with each of you should you wish. I hope you'll accept my invitation to come and speak with you, and I'll start that almost immediately. Thank you for watching out for that.

Statement by the Speaker

Order Paper Revisions

The Speaker: A small housekeeping item before we go on with other business. The Clerk will call other matters in a moment. I would like to point out a minor change that will be made to the Order Paper due to recent changes to Executive Council. Today's Order Paper shows the former Minister of Municipal Affairs by name as the sponsor of Bill 6. The Order Paper will be changed to simply indicate that the sponsor of this bill is the Minister of Municipal Affairs, period, which is how the bill has been printed. Hence, the sponsor of this bill will be the current member of Executive Council who has responsibility for this particular ministry.

In 30 seconds from now we will proceed further with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The issue at hand now is members' statements. I would just ask all of you to please be as respectful as possible when members are delivering private members' statements. They have the full right and honour to be heard and listened to carefully, and typically we do not entertain points of order during these private members' statements. Let's see how we can follow that and have it applied today.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, today we released even more documents highlighting the culture of bureaucratic waste at Alberta Health Services. Yesterday, of course, we revealed the big number, \$250 million on outside consultants in an 18-month period ending September 2013. Today let me give you an example.

We found out that a senior executive whose final day of employment with AHS was August 31, 2011, received a juicy consulting contract worth \$250,000 the very next day. The executive, Pam Whitnack, was an executive VP since the superboard was created. She served in her role until the end of May 2011, when her position was abolished through restructuring. She stayed on the payroll until the end of August 2011, at which point she started a private consulting company called Whitnack and Associates. She also collected over \$800,000 in executive pension, Mr. Speaker. According to our research Whitnack and Associates has received almost \$350,000 in consulting fees from AHS for, quote, executive coaching, unquote. Whether or not her \$250,000 contract is included in these payments or if it's on top of that amount, we don't quite know.

Mr. Speaker, here's the bottom line. An AHS executive VP was restructured out of her AHS executive position, handed an almost million-dollar pension package, and hired back the very next day on a sole-source consulting contract worth a quarter of a million dollars. This entire sordid example is precisely what is wrong with Alberta Health Services.

We've got lung cancer patients waiting twice as long for treatment as everyone else in Canada; we've got dialysis patients who can't get service in their cities and towns. There isn't enough money for these priorities, but there always seems to be enough money for well-connected health consultants. Albertans are tired of seeing their precious health care dollars flushed away. AHS is a disaster, and something must be done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Education System

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are real problems in Alberta's education system, but they're being obscured by the confused debate over curriculum being staged by the PCs and the Wildrose. Chronic underfunding, huge class sizes, and lack of support for special-needs students are the real educational issues facing Alberta families. [interjections]

There are serious concerns about curriculum as well, but they have to do with the PC government's rushed overhaul and the undue influence of the oil industry over what kids will be taught. The Wildrose, armed with their drive-by educational experts, have been spreading misinformation about where these problems come from, suggesting that Alberta is no longer teaching basic math skills and terrifying parents about the direction of Alberta's curriculum. It's the height of irresponsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta's New Democrats believe that schools need to teach both basic and applied skills. Children need the foundational math skills and also need to know how to apply them in the real world. We want to produce citizens who can think critically. That's something that the Wildrose, with their fundamentalist approach, would fail to do. [interjections]

In order to do any of this effectively, our schools need the supports and the funding that they've been denied by this PC government. Neither the PCs' sudden industry-led changes to the

curriculum nor the Wildrose's attempts to whip up anxiety about the curriculum for political gain will solve the problem in Alberta's schools.

A proper investment in learning and in teaching is the answer. We need to ensure that our children have the skills that they need to become fully functional citizens. That is the commitment of Alberta's NDP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, I specifically asked if you could please be polite and refrain from chatting, refrain from making noises, and all that kind of thing during private members' statements. Now, I'm sorry, but I have to cite Calgary-Buffalo. You spoke during almost the whole time. I know you didn't mean to; you got caught up with Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and someone else. But I would just ask you, please. Private members' statements are a very special time for private members, and we ought hear what they have to say, at least they ought be afforded the full opportunity, the dignity, if you will, to state their statements without any interruptions.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you did a good job getting your points out and hammering away anyway. Thank you.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

2:50

Edmonton Ski Club

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 50 years ago my brother Ross Dorward and I were at the opening week of Marmot Basin, Jasper, Alberta, an international skiing destination. Happy birthday, Marmot Basin.

Back in Edmonton here I had been skiing at the Edmonton Ski Club since I was six years old. In fact, I as well was a ski jumper, pretty much attending the club every weekend and several evenings during the week.

Today the club is in good hands, with Mr. Ken Saunders as president, his board, the staff, and the many, many volunteers that make it all possible. This not-for-profit club has been serving the people of Edmonton for the last 100 years. Consider this, Mr. Speaker: this club can be the hub of WinterCity recreational activities in the Saskatchewan river valley. As you know, the club is situated at the heart of the largest urban green space in North America, in the constituency that I represent, Edmonton-Gold Bar. Edmontonians from all over the city jog, bike, walk, and ski in the vast network of trails.

Mr. Speaker, this winter at the club many Edmontonians who have never skied, many from foreign lands, partook in Servus Free Friday, which provided them an opportunity to ski or snowboard. The stories are many, and the pictures are pretty special. Soon the LRT line will snake across the river from downtown to a station at the Muttart Conservatory then climb Connors hill en route to Mill Woods.

Thank you, city of Edmonton, for establishing the WinterCity strategy entitled For the Love of Winter. My colleagues in the Edmonton regional caucus will do all we can to support that strategy and support great places like the Edmonton Ski Club.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perched above the townsite of Banff on the side of buffalo mountain is one of Alberta's best kept secrets and iconic institutions, the Banff Centre. From its humble beginnings as the Banff school of fine arts in 1933, the Banff Centre has evolved into one of the world's largest incubators of new art and new ideas. The Banff Centre's mandate has been to make art and ideas accessible and to encourage us to think dynamically, dream big, tackle the tough questions, and, most importantly, to lead.

Last September the Banff Centre announced its intention to re-imagine its leadership programming as the Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute. In the Speech from the Throne our government committed to help fund the creation of the institute, working with the University of Alberta and the Banff Centre. The Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute is part of a collaboration between the Banff Centre and the University of Alberta called the Peter Lougheed leadership initiative.

The announcement to invest \$70 million over 10 years in the Peter Lougheed leadership initiative was made on March 6. New programming will be created for leaders, creators, and entrepreneurs in the public, arts and culture, social, and corporate sectors. Pilot programs in these areas will begin this summer. The institute will also support public school creative education, initially working with the schools in Banff and using technology to reach children and teachers across the province and nation.

It is our hope, Mr. Speaker, that the support demonstrated by the government will encourage the private sector and federal government to step forward and support this innovative initiative. The Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute will be officially launched at the Banff Centre later this year, positioning Banff, Alberta, and Canada at the forefront of global innovation for the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Sue Higgins

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour an individual who was and always will be loved by the citizens of Calgary. As we have heard, Calgary recently lost one of our most original political personalities with the passing of Sue Higgins. Known as a colourful, hard-working, straight-talking fiscal hawk, Sue Higgins served southeast Calgary on city council for 21 years.

There are countless stories of her cigarette smoking and her direct manner of speaking. Sue Higgins could be counted on to speak her mind clearly. Many will recall with affection when over 15 years ago there was a discussion to change the term "alderman" to "councillor." In true Sue Higgins fashion her reply was: I would rather be known as an alderbroad.

While serving on council, Sue Higgins would walk the talk to understand the challenges of our city. She was known to go through budgets with a fine-tooth comb, and when she had questions, you better have had the answers. There is even a story that she worked a shift on the back of a garbage truck.

Mr. Speaker, today we acknowledge the strong woman who, through her sacrifice and service to the city of Calgary, changed the face of what we know council to be today. Known as a champion of her communities, she was committed to the people through and through. Her love of hockey, especially the Flames,

was infectious, and she knew what mattered most to the people and acted accordingly.

Sue had a great sense of humour. For her retirement party she had banknotes made up with her picture on it, and the message underneath: more tender than you think. Indeed, she was more tender than you might think. She lived her life seeking to serve and help those in need. One of her final acts of kindness and service was to ask that instead of flowers, donations be made to the Calgary HandiBus Association.

We thank the family of Sue Higgins for their support and pass on our condolences. Sue Higgins knew to her core that living a life of service was the only life worth living, an example for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the profound honour of standing at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial on Vimy Ridge. I have looked up in awe at the white towers, standing oh so tall, cutting sharply into the French sky. I have run my fingers over the names of some of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France, including those lost in this historic three-day battle that alone claimed the lives of over 3,500 Canadians.

I have witnessed relatives finding the names of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers on the memorial and breaking down, personifying the grief portrayed in the statues that so beautifully adorn the monument, that will forever remind the world of Canada's achievement and of our sacrifice 96 years ago today.

I have seen with my own eyes the trenches, the ground still scarred from the shelling, the landmines, and the souls of those lost in this battle. I tried so hard to imagine how it must have felt in those trenches, looking up at the ridge from below, your friends falling to enemy fire all around you, and to find the resolve and perseverance to keep fighting.

As I overlooked the very ridge where it is said that Canada became a nation, I tried to imagine what those soldiers went through, how it could have felt to leave my family, my loved ones behind to fight for the notion of peace and fairness in a world far, far away. The fear, the adrenaline, the anger, the uncertainty, all on unfamiliar ground for most would have been too much, yet all of this was overcome by the Canadian soldiers fighting shoulder to shoulder for the first time, who prevailed against the odds to win this historic battle that was to become a turning point for the Allies in the First World War.

For all time, this day and the monument at Vimy Ridge will stand as a testament to everything this country stands for: courage, sacrifice, honour, justice, and peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've noted the time on the clock, and I caught the eye of the Deputy House Leader, presumably seeking unanimous consent. I'm not sure.

Mr. Denis: I would ask unanimous consent to waive rule 7(7).

The Speaker: You've heard the motion. Unanimous consent would be required so that we can go past three o'clock to finish a few items on Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Let us proceed, then, with Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, with your tabling.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table copies of the names of over 26,000 people who have signed a petition calling on this government to stop consulting with large companies like Syncrude, Cenovus, and Suncor on the redesign of our province's K to 12 curriculum. Kindergarten to grade 3 in particular is a very formative time in a child's education, and it's outrageous and appalling to have oil and gas companies involved in developing and writing curriculum for our kindergarten to grade 3 students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Centre or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've brought copies of a press release by Rocky View Teachers expressing their disappointment in three of their MLAs – the one from Airdrie, the one from Chestermere-Rocky View, and the one from Banff-Cochrane – for voting against Motion 503 and the establishment of GSAs in all schools where kids want them. They are sending three kids to Camp fYrefly as sort of their protest to those MLAs. I have a copy of that press release here, and I offer it to the page at this time.

The Speaker: Thank you. Was there another tabling on behalf of an hon. colleague?

Mr. Hehr: No.

The Speaker: Let's move on to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter dated February 4, 2014, that I had sent to the federal Justice minister and Attorney General, Peter MacKay, requesting additional funding for legal aid but also requesting a formula that does not discriminate against provinces like Alberta, which has had an explosive population increase. The letter also talks about how in the last 11 years there has been no federal funding increase to legal aid while our funding has continued to go up.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have tablings?

Mr. Bikman: Yes, please.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Bikman: I have a number of tablings and the requisite copies. The first is from Thaine Olsen, a constituent of mine in Magrath, commenting on the valuable STEP program, that was cancelled last year, and the impact that that's having on the community. I've also heard from others in the same vein.

Also, I have a letter from Brian Fozzard, president of Crowfoot Courier, talking about the 28th anniversary of his own little small business and asking us to "celebrate the strength of small business in our communities, by acknowledging the many women and men

who dedicate their lives to this most worthwhile institution." Of course, we know the role that small business plays in our communities.

I have a number of tablings from Perry Reese and Brant Reese, patrons of the Sage Creek Grazing Association, commenting on the alarming, powerful, nonelected lobby group with the power to overrule federal and provincial laws in our country. He points out that those who take advantage of grazing leases are good stewards of the land and do a tremendous job of caring for the land, perhaps better than just leaving it alone since there is nothing to graze on it, and he talks about the injustice that this represents and the serious impact that it will have on leaseholders like him as well as on little towns like Manyberries, Alberta, that rely on the oil activity in that area and that will now be shut down.

Finally, tablings from a number of residents in the town of Raymond concerned with the situation regarding the Raymond elementary school, particularly as it pertains to the kindergarten class. Among them I have Jenn Ehlert, Kathy Kawade, Lyndsi Coppieters, Mike and Amelia Quinton, and one that I didn't include was from Brittany Clark. I have the requisite number of copies there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are now at points of order. There were a number of points of order raised today. I've referred to them once, and we're now going to hear them.

We'll begin with point of order number 1, which was by the hon. Member for Airdrie. If you would care to proceed with point of order number 1, we'd be happy to hear it.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were three points of order. I can deal with two of them at once and the other one separately. I don't know if it's okay to proceed that way.

The Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Anderson: All right. The first point of order, Mr. Speaker, deals with Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly the two issues that arose. They were the same issue, just spoken by different members. The first was the reference by the Minister of Human Services, calling the folks over here the lake-of-fire party. The second was by the leader of the Liberal opposition, who, when questioning the Education minister, I believe, called members over there in the PC caucus homophobes.

I'm going to share with you something, Mr. Speaker. There are members of this caucus over here and others that have gay and lesbian family members, there are members of this caucus over here who have immediate family members and spouses who are visible minorities, there are also appreciated and cared-for employees at the highest levels of our party who are members of the LGBT community and others who are visible minorities, and all of us in this Assembly have dozens and even hundreds of close friends and acquaintances from both the LGBT community as well as visible minorities. So I think that some people can imagine the hurt and the pain that it causes certain members in this House and their family members and friends when they are referred to as bigots and homophobes.

To make it clear, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that our caucus over here – and I don't think there are many caucuses in here, if any, that would disagree with us on this point – passed a motion unanimously at the last Wildrose AGM of almost a thousand people that were there that said that the Wildrose will defend the

fundamental rights of freedoms of all persons, that this includes but is not limited to the right of freedom of belief, public expression, practice, and association, and that these rights and freedoms shall be protected regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, or sexual orientation of that person or classes of people.

We may in this House, Mr. Speaker, disagree on the best ways to protect these rights and these groups, and also we may disagree on the best ways of balancing competing rights, which can be very, very complicated, obviously, when you have the rights of one group that in some ways come up against the rights of others in our society from time to time. We sometimes disagree on that, on what laws to pass or what ideas will work in balancing those competing interests. But make no mistake; in my view, there are no homophobes in the PC Party that I've ever met, there are no racists in the Liberal Party that I've ever met, there are no religious bigots in the NDP that I'm aware of, and none of those terms could be applied to anybody in the Wildrose caucus either.

I had a debate this morning with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on CBC Radio on Motion 503. It was a very respectful debate. If anyone knows the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, of course, she argues her positions very well, very strongly, and with great passion. She did so this morning with complete integrity and was as forceful as any argument that I've heard on this issue, but she did so without degrading the other side of the argument. I think that that's an example of how we should debate these issues.

The reason I say that is because when we use comments that are meant to divide us in terms of people who hate and people who don't hate, when we use terms like "bigot" and "homophobe" to describe other people on another side of an issue, what happens is that, ironically, when we do that, we're promoting more intolerance. We promote hatred and division, especially outside of this Chamber, by people who watch this and get really upset and think that the person next to them should be looked on with suspicion and so forth.

3:10

I would just ask that as we go forward in this Assembly, all members of the House – my caucus, the government caucus, the Liberal and the ND caucuses – refrain from using words to describe each other like "bigots," "homophobes," "racists," those types of words that are so awful in what they mean if applied to another person that it really is just something that does not have a place in this House and that we debate these things strongly but that we do so respectfully.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Airdrie for his comments. With respect to the Minister of Education's reference to that party as homophobes, I would like to withdraw that on his behalf.

The Speaker: No, hon. member. You may have misheard. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition, who made a comment to that effect, not the Minister of Education.

Mr. Denis: If I may, Mr. Speaker, on the second item that I wanted to just mention on behalf of the Minister of Human Services, I think this can be dealt with, with respect, by way of a point of clarification. This goes back to a member of their party

who had said, "You will suffer the rest of eternity in the lake of fire, hell," and that was a reference to people in the LGBTQ community.

I recognize that no member of the caucus has said that. The Member for Airdrie didn't make that representation. But, similarly, I think that that's what the Minister of Human Services was referring to, and I think that that can be dealt with by way of a point of clarification.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else? Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for Airdrie for his impassioned speech. I take what he says at face value, and I applaud him for the sentiments that he shared with this honourable House.

At the same time, if I look at our 23(h), (i), and (j) – and I'll refer to them – it says:

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Those are the tests for a point of order to find a Member in this House in violation of the rules that we have set to govern ourselves in this House.

I guess that to put some context around the question asked by the hon. leader of the Alberta Liberals, he was asking his questions around Motion 503, which essentially read: be it resolved that gay-straight alliances be mandatory in all schools in this province where kids wish their existence, to have them. The reason for this motion and this question was that in Alberta we currently have a system of education that has private schools – some of them are private religious schools – public schools; public separate schools, which are Catholic schools; charter schools; and some francophone schools.

In that makeup of those schools there are different thoughts around sexual orientation and different values and mores ascribed by adults that in some instances may not allow for the children of those schools to start a gay-straight alliance. Those are facts. We can see that there are 40 gay-straight alliances in public schools in this province whereas, to my knowledge, there are zero – zero – in our Catholic system. There are zero at our private religious institutions. I think that is where the GSA . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, before we get a 459 on relevance and everything else, just restrict yourself to the point of order if you would, please. Otherwise, some would suggest you might be continuing the debate. So just zoom in on the point of order, please.

Mr. Hehr: I have to give context. I believe the hon. Member for Airdrie gave some context around his reasons for his comments, and I'd ask for the same leeway.

Okay. Hence, the question that was asked. If we look at the history of this province and the many people who have been here a long time, we have not been – largely the government party has not always openly embraced the movement of progress in this province towards tolerance and understanding. I think that's a fair comment, and the record understands that. It started when we were the last province to recognize sexual orientation in 2008. We then brought in Bill 44 shortly thereafter, which . . .

Mr. Oberle: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We don't normally do points of order during points of order. Is this about relevance?

Mr. Oberle: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: State your point briefly.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j) and the use of language that is likely to incite behaviour in this House, I would ask that you bring that member to order.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Airdrie just eloquently, as this hon. member pointed out, put some context around his response to the issue at debate right here, which is a point of order, to point out that the use of the term that we're talking about is absolutely unacceptable, and it was right for him to put some context around it. Now, if this hon. member wishes to put some context around why it is, in fact, acceptable to use that term, I'm going to object to that. I think it's incorrect. There is an absolutely ridiculous, unacceptable term on the floor. The member just needs to withdraw it. Withdraw it.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I suspected this might be going in that direction, which is why I cautioned you not two minutes ago, and I'm going to caution you again. We're not here to prolong the debate. Please. [interjection] Now, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, listen, please. I'm going to allow you a very brief moment to sum up your point. You've got one minute. Go ahead.

Mr. Hehr: Essentially, if we look at our rules – and you're right. I was going through the long history of events here in Alberta, and maybe I got carried away with that as I'm prone to do regarding a topic that I'm very passionate about, the promotion of human rights in this province. I apologize to members if they were sensitive towards me going through the history of that. Now I apologize to the hon. member.

Nevertheless, there was nothing directed at a member. According to the rules in this House, with nothing directed to a member – if some people felt the hon. member was calling an individual member a homophobe, well, that wasn't the case – I would stand by the fact that this is not a point of order at all.

The Speaker: Hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, do you wish to chime in here?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. This Motion 503 . . .

The Speaker: We're not here to debate 503. We're on a point of order, and it happens to be exactly about comments that you made, so if you could just zoom in on that, please.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, on this motion, on this issue, I wish to withdraw the words "in your caucus," and I apologize to the members if I offended anybody here. I withdraw "in your caucus," and I apologize. As you know, we are very passionate about the things that we discuss in the Legislature, and the passion here is expressed for the children. The hon. Member for Airdrie: I saw how hurt he was. I was watching outside. That's why I came running back in to withdraw those words and apologize.

With the passion of this bill and this motion, imagine if children are being called these words and the effect on them. So I make no apologies for my passion, but I do apologize if I offended anybody here.

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, two points of order have been raised at the same time. The second one deals with the comments made by the leader of the Liberal opposition, so I'm going to deal with that one first. I want to briefly just review what occurred here, and I apologize for the time. I know that estimates start at 3:30 and we're up against the time clock, but some things have to be said when making these rulings, so here we go.

At approximately 2:08 the leader of the Liberal opposition, among other things, said, according to the Blues, to the Premier: "Are you a placeholder Premier or a real Premier who puts children first by standing up to the homophobes in your caucus . . ."

Now, we've heard some debates and arguments on both sides of all of this. I'll talk a little bit more about it during the second ruling. We've also heard an apology and a withdrawal of certain words from the lips of the Liberal opposition leader.

But, hon. member, I wonder if you would like to reconsider and just retract that entire statement. That would make things a lot clearer and not leave any grey area, and I'm sure it would put the issue behind us. We all understand passion, we all understand heat of the moment, we all have made slips and mistakes, and others who have yet to make them I'm sure will at some point during their career here. So could I ask you to please just rethink and perhaps apologize for and retract that entire sentence?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, if it will please the Assembly, I'll retract the sentence.

Thank you.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

The Speaker: Let us move on to the second issue. This dealt with a comment made by the Minister of Human Services. The preamble to what I'm about to say goes back to about 2:01 this afternoon when the Leader of the Official Opposition said, "Mr. Speaker, the Human Services minister has also mused about becoming Premier." Then she went on to talk about avoiding the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars and asked him to resign his position from cabinet. I intervened and talked about that internal party matters ought not be raised here. Then the Minister of Human Services said: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has a very rather undignified appearance, if the member so wants to know, is that lake-of-fire party over there trying to zip one day, zag the other."

Now, that sort of falls into that category of intemperate language. I'm reminded of *Erskine May*, page 444, with respect to maintenance of order, House of Commons. Under the heading Allegations against Members it states the following. "Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. Parliamentary language is never more desirable than when a Member is canvassing the opinions and conduct of his opponents in debate."

Now, strictly speaking, the Minister of Human Services did not direct his comment to one single individual. However, I think by inference there was an implication made here, and I don't think it's an appropriate one, and I hope we won't hear it again. By the same token, I'm hoping we won't hear any intemperate accusations or false avowing of motives by members of the opposition against the government side because that knife slices both ways. You can't ask me for a ruling in favour of one when you're not prepared to accept a ruling against you perhaps another day. Please bear this in mind. I've spoken about it many times.

I'll save the House some time by simply asking the hon. Minister of Human Services or someone on his behalf if they wish to apologize and withdraw that particular reference.

Mr. Denis: I will withdraw that reference on the Minister of Human Service's behalf.

The Speaker: Thank you. That concludes that matter.

Now, we have two more points of order at least. The Minister of Justice.

Point of Order

Questions about Political Party Activity

Imputing Motives

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If it would please this Chamber, I think we can deal with both of these items omnibus.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. The citation deals with 23(h), (i), (j), and (l), familiar to many in this House.

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

And finally:

- (l) introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

Now, I basically have two statements. With respect to when I had risen – I don't have the benefit of the Blues that you do, Mr. Speaker – the Leader of the Official Opposition had indicated that there somehow were cuts in my department to an electronic monitoring program. There were no cuts. There were no such cuts. This particular program was a four-year pilot project that concluded on March 31, 2014. Subsequently, after I had spoken to the members for Red Deer-South and Red Deer-North and also some of the affected people, I had decided to continue this beyond that particular time. But to say that there were actual cuts is simply incorrect, and I would ask that the Leader of the Official Opposition please apologize and withdraw that particular comment. Again, I can table a document that proves there are no cuts. It was a \$450,000 program over that particular time, and then we decided to extend it past the expiry date. But to say that there were cuts in this particular area is simply false.

The second comment that I will make is on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader and the minister of environment with respect to the Leader of the Official Opposition's comments dealing with party matters. I will not beat a dead horse, Mr. Speaker, because you did rule on this yesterday, but I would say specifically that this again was a deliberate attempt to make allegations and impute motives upon many members of the government caucus. She suggested using government business to put forward bids for the PC leadership.

I quote again, from the citation *Beauchesne's* 409(7) on page 121.

- (7) A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.
- (8) A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again.

Your direction yesterday, that I won't quote, Mr. Speaker, is on page 384 of *Hansard*, but you clearly stated that there are to be no party items discussed in this particular House. So I would suggest that with respect to the Leader of the Official Opposition it is a

blatant attempt to sidestep rules in this Assembly. You ruled upon this yesterday.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure that you are aware, I want to point you also to *Beauchesne's* 193, which talks about a member that continually offends the practices of the Assembly, and *Beauchesne's* 193 you will find on page 55. It refers to: "In such cases Members who have breached the rules and who have refused to restore themselves to the grace of the House will not be recognized by the Speaker."

Of course, Mr. Speaker, dealing with our standing orders, Standing Order 24 deals with naming a member, and I'll leave that with you as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think this can be simply resolved if the Leader of the Official Opposition herself would rise in this House, would apologize, withdraw the remarks, and indicate that she will abide by your previous ruling. I do think that it would be incumbent to hear from her directly to explain the intent of her actions because no one can do that but her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the ankle bracelet funding issue I think, clearly, that's a point of clarification. The facts that we had before us, obviously, were why we were asking the question. We're, I know, very happy to see that the Minister of Justice is supporting that program going forward. Of course, our job as opposition is to sometimes light a fire once in awhile on that stuff. I think that's just a set of facts with maybe two different interpretations and so forth.

The second one was in regard to questions dealing with the race to be the next PC Party leader and, therefore, Premier. We did try. I know today the communications staff in our caucus and our party leader looked over your comments from yesterday, and we have tried to come up with a way that we can ask the question appropriately. We took out – for example, we added in "perceived" conflicts of interest as opposed to making accusations of conflicts of interest. We talked about perhaps resigning to avoid the "perception" of possible conflicts of interest. Hopefully, that was an appropriate change, but if that's not appropriate, then by all means please instruct us further on that.

Then with regard to – we didn't refer to the PC Party leader, of course, at this point. It referred specifically to the Premier's office, the head of Executive Council.

3:30

So we've tried to reword these things. Obviously, sometimes when you ask us to reword things, it can be difficult to make that balance. I know that if the Official Opposition leader said anything that went against your ruling last time, she would be happy to withdraw and, upon further instruction on the matter, pursue it using a different angle.

The key here is that there is a desire on our side, Mr. Speaker, if you can instruct us on how to deal with it, to just want to make sure that we can ask the government side about perceived conflicts of interest if they're going to run for PC leader. If that's completely out of the scope, well, then it's completely out of the scope. You let us know, and we will cease asking about it. But if you feel it is within the scope, then please instruct us as to the best way to pursue that line of questioning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations briefly.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are actually two issues at play here, and I think they're both rather important. The

first is whether a member of the bench or a member of this caucus intends to seek the leadership of the PC Party. You have admonished repeatedly and, I believe, correctly that that is not a matter for discussion on the floor of this House. That's party business. However – and I think the opposition is right in this – whether or not a member, any member of this front bench or caucus, is in a conflict-of-interest position is indeed a matter for discussion on the floor of this House.

However, one cannot accuse somebody of being in a conflict of interest short of being able to table evidence that indicates the same. You have admonished repeatedly in this House that one cannot attempt to achieve indirectly what one cannot achieve directly, and that is an absolute attempt – and the clearest it has been so far is today, when they actually linked it to the situation with the ankle bracelet, that the Minister of Justice faced. It fell just short of an outright accusation but clearly linked that decision and the subsequent moves made by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to a potential conflict of interest because he may or may not be contemplating something else. That is clearly attempting to achieve indirectly what one cannot achieve directly, Mr. Speaker.

So it's not a matter of clarification. It's a matter of, I think, correctly requesting that the member withdraw those remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Well, hon. members, on the first issue, and recognizing that estimates have already started, about cuts to a program or no cuts, I've skimmed through what I could of the Blues. I don't have all of the Blues, hon. members. Truly, in the end I think the Minister of Justice has got his clarification on the record saying one thing and the Member for Airdrie perhaps saying another in support of his leader. I see it more as a note of clarification, and I think we're going to just drop that issue there. Perhaps this will be pursued further tomorrow – I don't know – but let's end that one right there as a point of clarification.

With regard to the second point, which is to do with party matters being raised, this one gets into a little more of the cut and thrust of debate. I'm well aware of the ruling that I gave yesterday. I not only thought about it before I gave it, but I phrased it in such a way to be particularly pointed and, hopefully, in a way to be particularly constructive, if not helpful, to avoid the recurrence of it in the future. I did note today that the Leader of the Official Opposition basically went down a similar vein but eliminated the word "PC," which clearly makes it very, very political.

Now, it's a very difficult thing to sit in the chair and try and judge just spontaneously whether something is in order or out of order: did it cross the line or didn't it? In this case I allowed considerable leeway, but you saw where it went, and then I had to stand up nonetheless because suddenly three or four points of order were raised. When you are skating that close to the line, hon. members, especially, in this case, Wildrose members, you are really tempting your own fate.

Again, party matters, internal party matters, financing of campaigns, that type of political stuff just does not belong in this Assembly. If you want me to make that hard, fast rule and curtail the debate, then I'll have to consider doing that. It not only takes up valuable time – and that is not constructive to anybody – but it also leads to the avowing of motives against others, and you could construe some of those as personal attacks because there's innuendo involved here. There's innuendo involved. Just because someone is a minister and perhaps there are rumours by the media or by the press, unconfirmed ones, that he or she may be doing

something political in terms of their future doesn't necessarily make it so.

I would like to think and I would like to know that members who have taken that separate, special oath to be cabinet ministers would never put themselves at risk of doing something inappropriate. I just don't think that that's the case, and I'll bet you the same can be said of opposition members. In this case, raised by the Wildrose, I'm sure that nobody would appreciate questions or answers or statements being made about how you might be misusing your LAO budget. It could be said. It could be said in the same derogatory-type way, as an innuendo, and I would have to jump in and defend you in that case, and I would.

So in this case I'm going to ask you to remember just exactly what the Minister of Aboriginal Relations said because I have written it down here myself. You cannot do indirectly what is forbidden to do directly. Going around and skirting around it has to stop, and it has to end. So I'm going to ask for that for the last time, that you be very careful how you word your questions.

I'm fully in support of freedom of speech to the maximum. I'm pledged, honour bound, and oath bound to allow you to speak and speak and speak, and I do that. I do it to my own detriment sometimes, because I get nasty notes from both sides of the House sometimes. It's the most unpopular job in this Assembly – and you know it – because you can't possibly do a good job unless everybody is equally mad at you. You know, we joke about it at the Speakers' conferences. Then you know. That's why we meet is to console each other.

Let us leave that as a point well clarified and, hopefully, not to be visited again in the near future.

That having been said, I believe we're going to adjourn here so that estimates can carry on.

Was there another point? I'm sorry. There's one more point of order. My apologies.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: I'll keep this very short. It's section 23(h), (i), and (j) I'm referring to, specifically with regard to allegations against a member. There was a comment by the Minister of Infrastructure that said that I was on Treasury Board when the decision was discussed to approve the Federal building. It was in that context. That is not true. It was never discussed in my tenure on Treasury Board. The decision predated that time. I've been an outspoken critic of that office as well as many others in that PC caucus at the time. The minister continues to claim that that's the case, that that was discussed while I was on Treasury Board, that somehow I had any input into that decision. I would ask that he table an agenda of a meeting or meeting minutes or anything that would show proof of that. Otherwise, I would just ask that he refrain from making this claim in the future because it's just not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope I'm not going to scare you with my memory here, but the Member for Airdrie was sworn into Treasury Board on September 15, 2009, the same day I was sworn in as parliamentary assistant for Energy, and he remained on there until January 4, 2010, when he decided to change caucuses, which is his right.

Mr. Speaker, I was not on Treasury Board at that particular time, but the member was just referring to the fact that he was on Treasury Board. I don't know what was discussed in that meeting. I don't know if you can actually table a Treasury Board document

before this Assembly. I suggest that you probably cannot. Moving forward, I would suggest that this is simply just a matter of clarification because the member was on Treasury Board during the dates that I had indicated.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll deal with this fairly quickly. Here's what was said in *Hansard*, according to the Blues. The Minister of Infrastructure rose after the Leader of the Official Opposition asked him a question about "the integrity to do the right thing and say no to this very bad idea," that being with reference to the alleged penthouse that may or may not have been on the books for consideration. The Minister of Infrastructure stood and said:

Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the member is talking about documents that are made public, and the fact is that change orders don't typically go to cabinet. In fact, you know, if you want to talk about accountability, perhaps the leader could ask the person sitting on her immediate right – I tabled the documents in this House yesterday showing that he was on Treasury Board at least one and possibly two years when this item was discussed – and ask him. The fact is that he would know that not all change orders of projects actually go to Treasury Board. This didn't happen . . .

And it goes on.

3:40

Now, I have no way of knowing what happened at a particular Treasury Board meeting. Public record would indicate who the members certainly were, but nowhere would we know what the

discussion might have been. A tabling says that a certain member was on there, so I'll take that member at his word, but by the same token, who knows if anybody who was in Treasury Board or some other committee meeting happened to be at a particular meeting where a particular item was discussed? We have no way of knowing that.

I think we have to accept two different versions of this statement right now and call this matter to a close. Just be careful, again, about allegations that we make and in particular if they're tied to accusations. Be very careful.

I'll close just by reminding everyone that there are numerous citations that you can look at, and the one that I'll just bring to your attention quickly is in *Erskine May* on page 445, where it talks about "the imputation of false or unavowed motives" that "prompt interference." There are other examples there as well. So please let's not have that be repeated again. That concludes that point of order.

Now, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) we stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow, noting that the two committee meetings are already under way for Families and Communities. Estimates for Human Services are going on in committee room A and will be going on for some time, and in committee room B it's Alberta's Economic Future, who are considering the estimates for Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Tonight at 7 Resource Stewardship will be considering the estimates of Energy in committee room A.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:42 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 10, 2014

Issue 16

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 10, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. As we reflect on our work in this Chamber for this week, let us be thankful for the opportunity given to us by our constituents to serve them. Pray that we always be reminded of the trust they have placed in us to represent them, regardless of the issues that arise in this Chamber or in our constituencies. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us begin with school groups, starting with Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of this Assembly 13 bright, young students from Glenwood school. The town of Glenwood is a small but beautiful community located in the foothills near Waterton park in my constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. These fine and eager students are also accompanied by their principal, Kelly Thomas; his lovely wife, Kathy; and vice-principal, D.J. Scott. I would ask that our guests from Glenwood please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 90 visitors that we have today from Ralph McCall school in Airdrie. They're seated in the gallery today. I'd like to introduce their teachers first – Ms Pamela Burke, Mr. Robert Saipe, Miss Katie Kraemer, Mr. Brian Jackson, and Ms Christine Tatomir – as well as their parent helpers, Ms Andrea Quick, Mrs. Linda Sefcik, Mrs. Penny Diechert, Mr. Cory Fries, Mr. Patrick Parker, and Mr. Aaron Vance Bird. If everyone could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let's move on to other introductions, starting with Edmonton-South West, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Jeneroux: Great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two strong advocates for youth engagement in Alberta. Both of my guests attended our second youth think tank held at Government House on March 15 and gave their input on how government, in particular the Youth Secretariat, can engage youth. My first guest is an alumni member of the Youth Advisory Panel, Amber Moos. She is an advocate for mentorship programs, after attending the National Mentoring Symposium in Banff, and is a student at Vanguard College. With her is my very good friend David Rust, the director of community partnerships for the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, with whom I've had the pleasure of having many great discussions on

the future of youth in our province. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four people that are joining us in the gallery. I'm not sure which side quite yet, but these are all people who work at one of the seniors' residences in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre and specifically that is The Churchill, now called the Revera Churchill. These are all AUPE members, and if they are in the gallery, would they please rise. It's Rhonda Wolfe, Kevin Tirimba, Nothando Mkwanarzi, and Eyerusalem Girmay. Oh, there they are. And with them somewhere is my friend Trevor Zimmerman, I hope. They have risen. I would ask that we please acknowledge the very hard work of people that are working in seniors' care in Alberta today. These are members of AUPE, and they are doing a stellar job for us, working with our seniors and vulnerable adults. They are up for a contract dispute, so I hope that's going to go well for them. Please join me in welcoming them today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my guest, Sonam Sharma. Sonam is part of the making change project through the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, which seeks to orient Canadian girls of Middle Eastern and South Asian heritage toward leadership roles in Canada's civic, political, and community life. They've recently concluded a needs assessment that highlights the barriers that restrict girls' leadership potential, and one such need is to find a female mentor and a role model in their field of interest. Sonam has expressed an interest in provincial politics and has asked to shadow me for a few days to see what it's like. Hopefully, she'll choose politics anyway. I would now ask Sonam to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two wonderful people that are close friends from my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod who live in the historic town of Turner Valley, Bob and Joan Weder. Bob is an engineer who is receiving his 40-year pin from the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta, known as ASET, here in Edmonton this weekend. He was also my chief northern district campaign director in the 2012 election, and his efforts along with his wife Joan's were exemplary. Joan is a long-time friend who spent many years working in downtown Calgary and also is a key volunteer in the Okotoks Agricultural Society. Bob and Joan are here in Edmonton today to tour the Legislature and also observe question period. At this time I would invite Bob and Joan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the president and staff of the Edmonton branch of the Memory Keepers Association of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis of Rwanda. I would now ask that the individuals please stand as I call their names: Rubarake Seth Muhima, president of the Memory Keepers Association; Emmanuel Kaviziya, vice-president; Marie-Gracia Mujiraneza, adviser; Marie-Claudette Kantengwa, adviser; and Uwamwezi Speciose, adviser. I would now ask that they receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four elected student leaders: Petros Kusmu, Navneet Khinda, Sean Glydon, and Chris Hollingsworth. These individuals are leaders in the student community and represent the best and brightest that Alberta has to offer. In fact, we had a good chit-chat, and I suggested that they serve with us in the near future as Liberal MLAs. They have been meeting with many members of this Assembly in order to advocate on issues important to Alberta postsecondary students and all of society: more funding for mental health programs; a return of the STEP program, in fact a super-STEP program; regulation on mandatory noninstructional fees; plus a massive investment in postsecondary education, just to name a few. I would ask these four leaders to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you, in fact, to all members of this august Assembly Beverly Eastham, Missy Chareka, Adam Woods, Shuna Talbot, and William Lau. These students are representatives of CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students. CAUS is an advocacy group representing over 100,000 Alberta students. Their leadership is crucial for Alberta's postsecondary students to have their voices heard. I would ask Beverly, Missy, Adam, Shuna, and William to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Let us begin with Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Rwandan Genocide

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty years ago a dark moment in humanity's history occurred, an event that must never be forgotten: the Rwandan genocide. In 1994 innocent Rwandans with dreams and some with families, people just like you and me, were slaughtered, murdered solely for political motivations.

In 1994 Rwanda was composed of three ethnic groups: approximately 85 per cent Hutu, 14 per cent Tutsi, and 1 per cent Twa. The ruling elite, due to mounting social and political tensions coupled with the debilitated economic reality, employed the use of propaganda to malign the Tutsi minority and defer

attention away from the country's problems. On April 6, 1994, the plane carrying Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana, often described as a dictator, was shot down. This was blamed on the wrong people, Mr. Speaker. Hutu extremists used the assassination as an opportunity to promote their intolerant ideological beliefs, scapegoating the Tutsis as the main cause of Rwanda's problems, in fact. From April to mid-July 20 years ago over 800,000 men, women, and children, sometimes counted up to a million, were massacred. Approximately three-quarters of the Tutsi population were lost.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today because I believe we have a moral duty and privilege to stand up for the rights of those who, for whatever reason, cannot. I speak to the entire Assembly when I say that we must emphasize the things that unite us as human beings rather than highlight the superficial differences between us. At the end of the day, we all want to be respected, we all desire and need to be loved, and there's nothing more human than that. Let us never forget those lives that were pointlessly sacrificed 20 years ago. If we learned lessons, they were not lost in vain.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, let me say a few words about Jim Flaherty. Canada lost a great friend today. Minister Flaherty was as dedicated and patriotic a public servant as you will find anywhere. His leadership as Finance minister helped steer Canada through the worst economic crisis we've seen in decades to a surplus budget and a very bright future. Our thoughts and our deepest condolences are with Jim Flaherty's family.

Flood Recovery and Mitigation in High River

Ms Smith: Since being elected in 2012 I've done my best to inform Albertans about how this government spends, misspends taxpayer dollars. In my home community of High River we see yet another example. Using outdated and incorrect 1992 flood maps, this government has made one particular decision that makes no financial sense, and it is extremely upsetting to the residents of High River. The flawed flood maps situate the community of Beachwood in the floodway. Because of this the government has determined that all of the homes in Beachwood need to be bought out at an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$30 million. This will result in the displacement of 30 families and the destruction of beautiful, perfectly sound homes.

You might ask: but what alternative is there? Well, let me tell you. Over the past few years the community of Beachwood and the town of High River have spent more than \$2 million building a berm to protect the community from hundred-year flood levels. This berm made Beachwood one of the better protected communities in High River. The estimated cost to do the necessary repairs to the berm is \$1 million. Now, a responsible government would examine the updated flood maps – and yes, Premier, they do exist – spend less than a million dollars mitigating the future loss, and redirect the estimated \$29 million saved to rebuild the homes, businesses, and community infrastructure in the rest of High River.

The first item of business our newly elected town council addressed was to determine how they would protect Beachwood with the town's own infrastructure money. After months of meetings between the town and the province the province has moved forward with their irresponsible plan to demolish Beachwood. Mr. Speaker, it's not too late for the Premier to do the right thing and reverse the decision.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Project Brock

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Brock Ruether, a 16-year-old boy from Fairview in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, collapsed in May of 2012 during an after-school volleyball practice. Emergency services were immediately contacted, and lay rescuers were instructed to fetch the school's automated external defibrillator, or AED. Tragically, no one on the scene felt comfortable using this instrument. So when emergency medical services arrived 10 minutes later, the device lay on the ground next to Brock, still unused. Brock was transported to a nearby hospital but passed away. He may have been saved had someone used this device.

Since Brock's death the Ruether family has launched a vigorously advocated awareness campaign lovingly named Project Brock. Brock's mother, Kim Ruether, is making it her mission to educate the public on AEDs and their ease of use. She has also partnered with the Regional EMS Foundation. So far Project Brock has placed AEDs in many schools throughout Alberta. She hopes to expand AED installations to all schools but also sees a strong need for these devices in all work environments.

Kim Ruether is also a strong advocate for education and awareness as her son's case is proof that merely installing an AED is not enough. Project Brock encourages schools to create their own training programs for students and teachers, and Kim makes presentations and demonstrates how an AED is used.

The Ruether family has made good progress on their project. They've started with the schools in my constituency, the northwest, and will go on from there, concentrating on small rural schools. Project Brock is encouraging governments to ensure that AEDs are available in schools and public places. I wish to recognize the Ruether family today for devoting their time and energy towards a very worthy cause by encouraging everyone to place AEDs in all areas of public use.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Successful Teams

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, our thoughts and prayers are with Jim Flaherty and his family.

Successful teams are highly accountable organizations. They're not connected through blind loyalty; rather, they are bound by a commitment to a set of principles and a shared vision that every member of the team has a role in contributing towards. Successful nonprofit organizations like Rotary have their values in a four-way test to advance their humanitarian efforts of service above self. Values and visions are also fundamental to the success of the 50 top managed companies, one of those being Avison Young, who, for example, prominently list their values as pillars of their corporate culture.

The Golden Bears hockey team's values are detailed in Wooden's pyramid of success and the belief that it is amazing what can be accomplished when no one cares who gets the credit and that you consciously practise good habits or you will unconsciously develop bad ones. The vision of competing play by play, shift by shift, game by game, season by season leads to

success. Even with new players and coaching changes there is a consistent set of values, vision, and a culture of success.

This year General Manager Stan Marple and Coach Ian Herbers led the Bears to win their 51st Canada West title and record 14th national championship. Other national champions at the University of Alberta include Bears volleyball and Pandas rugby. These are student athletes and role models of success in both academics and athletics. Along with the accomplishments at the University of Alberta in science, technology, health, arts, and business, the Bears and Pandas contribute to this great sense of pride *for the university, the city of Edmonton, and the province of Alberta.**

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Daycare

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As both a resident and representative of a young and growing community in Edmonton-South West I share with many of my constituents a concern for issues regarding child care. Neighbourhoods such as Southbrook, MacEwan, the Hamptons, Windermere, and Ambleside are home to many new families with young children. Understandably, the question of how to care properly for young children while also maintaining a livable income is a constant concern. For many of these families it is a requirement that both parents have steady incomes. The costs of modern home ownership, rent, and feeding a family are considerable.

It is equally understandable that these parents are also concerned about how they can entrust their children to reliable daycare services as they work to earn a living. It makes sense to me that daycare services operated on location at a parent's place of work are the easiest and most desirable option. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this is what many parents in Edmonton-South West have been telling me. Since transportation to the nearest child care facility is often an issue, being able to take one's child to work to receive care would alleviate a major source of worry for many parents. It is important that we do what is best for our kids first and foremost, ensuring that they are in safe hands while their parents work to provide for them.

There are also economic advantages to ensuring that child care is convenient and accessible. The simple fact of the matter is that readily available and trustworthy child care means more Albertans in the workplace. I am sure that all of us can appreciate the clear economic benefits of this. An investment in child care is clearly an investment in Alberta's future in more ways than one. It is an investment in our children. It is an investment in our bottom line for the shorter term. There are great child care services and facilities available, but I believe that there's always more that can be done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, could I just say thank you for the decorum you showed by listening carefully to all the statements that were just given. That was well done on your part.

Let us move on.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: You are reminded that you are given 35 seconds for each question and 35 seconds for each answer. Let's start the

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

clock with the hon. Member for Highwood, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Regional Dialysis Service

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I was in Athabasca on Tuesday night at a very well-attended town hall meeting. The number one issue I heard about was the complete absence of dialysis machines for patients with kidney problems. Patients in Athabasca have to travel several hours to Edmonton or Lac La Biche for dialysis several times a week. Some have even had to uproot their lives to move to and live permanently in Edmonton. This treatment is relatively cheap and is potentially life-saving. To the Health minister: why is Athabasca being ignored?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, Athabasca is not being ignored. Contrary to the premise of the hon. member's question, actually, dialysis is a very complicated procedure. Renal failure and renal disease affect increasing numbers of Albertans across the province, and we use a variety of methods to deliver that care. In many cases we do not have sufficient volume to establish an in-patient dialysis unit at a hospital. We use mobile dialysis. We use home dialysis increasingly to meet those needs.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the cost of a dialysis machine is roughly \$50,000. To put that into context, that's about one-fifth of what AHS spends on executive coaching every year. It's just another example of the bloated AHS bureaucracy sucking up taxpayer dollars that are badly needed on the front lines for patients. To the Health minister: isn't it more important for Athabasca patients to get the life-saving treatment they need in their community than for a handful of AHS executives to beef up their resumes?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Education does an excellent job of advocating for his own constituents. In addition to that, he actually takes the time to try to understand and communicate the issues regarding health care for constituents in his area.

Once again, the citizens of Athabasca and the citizens of this province do receive the life-saving services they need. The patients themselves are the best testament to that, the front-line staff are the best testament to that, and any attempt to politicize that discussion does a disservice to all.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has also been a tireless advocate, and he's done so for dialysis patients. As a result of his hard work and public pressure, Lac La Biche now has five dialysis machines serving patients in their community. My question is to the Education minister, who sits at the cabinet table and is also the MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Is he going to learn a lesson in public advocacy from my colleague, or do the people of his constituency have to elect a Wildrose MLA in order to get an MLA to stand up for their interests?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit speechless at what to even say to that. I work incredibly hard for my constituents. I think that many of them would be the first testament to that as they point to the many things that we've even announced in the Athabasca region in the last couple of years, including the school that was just announced and the pipeline training facility at Boyle or the twinning of highway 63, which the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills tried to take a little bit of credit for but is, of course, because of the good work of this government. That's where the credit lies.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister needs to have another town hall meeting in Athabasca.

Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account

Ms Smith: Last week I asked the Premier about government policy that allows the PC Party to do things which no other political party can do. Albertans are obviously concerned by the double standard in legislation that has allowed the PCs to grandfather in the TAPCAL trust. They are concerned about what is being hidden in the trust. I want to repeat my question to the Premier. Will this government do the right thing and immediately introduce legislation to fully disclose and permanently dissolve the TAPCAL trust?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to take this opportunity to recognize the contribution that Jim Flaherty has made to this country. I had the opportunity to serve with him when I was Minister of Justice and he was Justice minister in Ontario. I had an opportunity to work with him directly. He made a huge contribution to Ontario and to the country as a whole.

With respect to the TAPCAL trust I've talked with the president of the PC Association of Alberta and asked them to review the terms of the trust in terms of how it could be wound down. It should be clear that that trust was set up in legislation with respect to the transition from an old form of finances to the new form of finances. Anybody could have done it at the time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has stated several times that the PCs only take out the interest from the trust as required by law. That does not appear to be the case, however. Media reports suggest that in 1992 the PC Party removed \$513,000 from the trust. That couldn't have been just interest. The Premier has had over a week to get briefed on this matter. Can he tell us what legislation actually prevents the PCs from adding funds to the trust or removing more than just the interest from the trust?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act makes it clear that any money that's raised for political purposes has to be done under the context of that act. The hon. member probably has had enough time to study that act to understand that as well.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We still don't know what the rules are regarding this trust because they don't have to report on it.

Mr. Speaker, the government might suggest that the creation of special loopholes to give advantages to the PC Party is something that happened a long time ago, but in 2012 the Justice minister made changes to election laws which make it illegal for political parties to have foundations with more than \$5,000 in them, except that the government once again exempted the PC Party from that law. To the Justice minister: why does the government continue to pass laws that treat his party one way and all the other parties differently?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, we have a Chief Electoral Officer in this province that every party agreed to very recently. His name is Glen Resler. If she thinks that there's something improper that's been done, I encourage her – in fact, I insist – to contact Mr. Resler and make a comment, make a complaint. We are not in the business of policing individual political parties in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Actually, it is the Justice minister's job to create election law reforms.

Flood Advisory and Warning System

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, flood season is upon us again. We have had flooding in downtown Peace River and the Carstairs and Strathmore areas as well. Albertans want to know that we will have quality and timely information from our flood forecasters. Critics of our forecasting system have contemptuously called it now casting, meaning that residents don't hear that it might flood until it actually is flooding. Can the Premier tell us what steps have been taken to improve the quality and timeliness of information Albertans will get about possible floods?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an important question. I know that all Albertans do want to know what's going on. I can say that we are measuring the snowpack on a regular basis. I can tell this Assembly that the snowpack is a little bit above average. We've put more monitoring systems in place along our river system so that we have better measurements as the water rises. We're also putting in early-warning systems for communities downstream so that when we have the flood advisory from our experts, we can make sure those communities are made aware. We also are investing right now in making sure that all of our emergency supplies and the information we need are being updated as we speak.

Ms Smith: The current flood advisory system is deeply flawed. It only has three levels: high stream flow advisories, flood watches, and flood warnings. However, a flood warning isn't actually a warning; it's a statement of the blatantly obvious. By the time you get to a flood warning stage, you are already under water. Is any work being done to improve the system used to describe flood threats so that they actually provide meaningful and timely warnings in advance of the water breaching the banks?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we do have the monitoring in place. Again, you know, we can't predict the weather, but we do have more monitoring put into our rivers. I say to you that we have measured the snowpack. At the present time we do have some flood warnings and some flood advisories out because we've had heavy snow in our flat areas and very warm temperatures, which has created some issues. But I can say that most flooding is because of intense rainfall in the eastern slopes of the Rockies. We will have monitoring in place and people in place to make sure that people get the early warnings they need.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues during last year's flood was the lack of timely warnings to the residents of High River. We were very lucky that the flood struck mid-morning rather than in the middle of the night; otherwise, the death count would have been much, much higher. Last week High River unveiled its new alert system, which includes direct notification and public sirens.

But I wonder what's happening in other municipalities. What steps have been taken in other communities to make sure that a middle of the night flood doesn't become a tragedy?

2:00

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as I stated, we're monitoring our rivers, especially in the June period of time, when we're going to see most of our flooding because we'll have snowpack melt plus rainfall. We'll have early-warning systems in place all along the river systems, and we'll have people on 24-hour alert to make sure that people get the advance notice that they need. But, again, understand that in last year's flooding, in 2013, the fact that we had 214 millimetres of rainfall in 24 hours was unprecedented, and the ability to have any idea what impact that was going to have downstream – it was very hard to predict.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals our heartfelt condolences and prayers for Mr. Flaherty and his family. Thanks to him for serving our great country.

Health Care Performance Indicators

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot about the quarter billion dollars wasted by AHS consultants, but we haven't seen the latest AHS quarterly performance reports because the Health minister refuses to release them. Well, the Alberta Liberals FOIPed them, and I have them right here in my hand. Here's what they show. Heart bypass surgery wait times: fail. Hip and knee surgery replacement wait times: fail. Physician-staff engagement: fail. Patients admitted from ER: fail. To the Minister of Health. The doctors, nurses, staff will give you free advice . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we changed the performance indicators that we use to report on the performance of the health system some time ago, and we changed them in order that we could accomplish two things: that we could report on indicators that were actually meaningful to Albertans and, secondly, that we could report on indicators that were directly comparable to other provinces and territories. If we take the issue of hip and knee replacements, for example, we know that today Alberta is exceeding the national average in wait times for hip and knee surgery. Does that mean we're satisfied with today's performance? Absolutely not. We can do better. But these statistics that the hon. member was presenting out of context . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader. First sup.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They changed them from world-class 90 percentiles to averages, which hide their failures, and they still won't publish them every quarter.

Mr. Speaker, consultants aren't the only thing AHS wasted a quarter billion dollars on. The number of people waiting in hospital for an alternate level of care, including long-term care, has increased from 436 to 535. That's about another quarter billion dollars wasted by providing the wrong care. Warnings that privatizing home care and long-term care and that cutbacks to community supports would have both a high human and dollar cost have been ignored for years by this PC government. To the Health minister: can't you see that your failed seniors' policy is not only wasting money, hurting people . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, what this hon. member can't see is that the answer to every problem in the health care system is not simply beefing up resources in an emergency department. In fact, despite the increasing growth in this province, 140,000 people last year, we have seen a decline in the wait times for placement into continuing care of 37 per cent between 2009-10 and 2012-13. I think we're doing exceedingly well, or I should say that the front-line staff are doing exceedingly well, at reducing the time people are waiting for critical services while running the health system that is growing the fastest . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the minister is right. The health care staff are doing a great job; just the government isn't. By the way, your own record shows you're failing.

A quarter billion dollars on consultants, a quarter billion dollars on hospitalizing people who don't need to be hospitalized, and we haven't even mentioned the cost of delays in care. The half billion dollars that we have discussed is pretty close to what's needed to build a new Misericordia hospital that would serve all of Edmonton and northern Alberta. The Misericordia should have been replaced years ago. Instead, this government is throwing good money after bad in the maintenance of an old hospital. To the Health minister: will you commit to building a new Misericordia hospital? If yes, when? If no . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all Albertans continue to be impressed by the level of attention that the hon. member is drawing to one of many hospitals, in fact, 99 hospitals, across this province. We have invested over \$19 million in critical infrastructure repairs at the Misericordia. As I have said to this House before, and I'll say it again, we are well into the planning process for a new hospital for the city of Edmonton and to serve the larger capital region. That process is not going to be determined by this House; it's going to be determined by experts. We will continue to increase capacity at unprecedented rates in this country.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Student Gay-straight Alliance Requests

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister asked yesterday for proof that any students had ever been denied the right to set up a gay-straight alliance in their school. Today it's come to light that the minister was not only aware of at least one such case; he actually wrote a letter to the St. Albert school board supporting just such a decision. Mr. Minister, can you please explain this contradiction?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the situation he's talking about happened two years ago. I am not aware of another case in the last two years. My understanding with respect to that case is that it was handled at the local level, which is where, we would submit, these things should be handled. We had a student who was in that situation. He brought that forward. He wanted to set up a GSA. The school board, the local principal, the administration recognized that they had an issue, and my understanding is

that they've dealt with that issue to the satisfaction of all concerned. That's my understanding of the situation, and I haven't heard anything to the contrary in the last two years.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I didn't know that there was a statute of limitations on the truth. The minister has suggested to us that because his involvement took place more than two years ago, the proof that he asked for was not – I mean, I'm flabbergasted that he would kind of use that excuse for not telling the House the facts, that there are cases where GSAs are prohibited by schools. He was aware of it, and he actually wrote a letter to support it. Why, Minister?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the letter I wrote said that I was in support of the local school board making decisions that are appropriate for the local school. My understanding is not that the GSA was refused but that they dealt with the issue to the satisfaction of all concerned. One of the issues was, to my understanding . . .

Mr. Hehr: Wow.

Mr. J. Johnson: . . . and this is what happens in many schools . . .

Mr. Hehr: Wow.

Mr. J. Johnson: . . . that kids come forward with the bullying issue. But there are other students in need that have bullying issues . . .

Mr. Hehr: Wow.

Mr. J. Johnson: . . . and there might be a bullying issue in the school, so they want to set up a support group for all students . . .

Mr. Hehr: Wow.

Mr. J. Johnson: . . . and not be exclusionary to others in just setting up a GSA. Those are decisions that should be made at the local level. That's what was supported in the letter.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, one more "wow," and you'll be wowing with me.

The hon. leader for the ND opposition. Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, wow. The minister told us that there was no proof that kids who wanted to set up a GSA had ever been stopped by a school or a school board, yet he knew that there was, and he didn't tell us that. Now he's using weasel words to try to get around the fact that he did not give us a statement in accordance with what he knew to be true. So what is the problem, Minister? Why can't you tell the truth?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking the truth. I, obviously, in 2012 was aware that there was a student that brought forward a request for a GSA. I'm not aware of any outstanding issues with students bringing forward requests for GSAs that have been turned down, that have not been resolved to the students' satisfaction. My understanding was that in that situation it was resolved to the student's satisfaction.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Kindly curtail your preambles from here on in.

Let's go with Calgary-Varsity, then Calgary-Fish Creek.

Carbon Emissions Reduction

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent UN report warning of growing risks to health, economies, and food sources from climate change has intensified the spotlight on carbon rules. My constituents in Calgary-Varsity pay attention to this issue, and they're asking good questions about Alberta's role in reducing emissions and protecting social licence. To the Minister of Environment and SRD. Many of my constituents, including employees in energy companies, want clarity and certainty on carbon rules. Do you plan to strengthen the specified gas emitters regulation, up for renewal on September 1?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that, you know, we do have very clear rules in the province of Alberta about greenhouse gas emissions. We are the only jurisdiction that has a carbon tax. We are the only jurisdiction that has a clean energy fund. We are right now in discussions with all of our stakeholders across the province about future funding moving forward. Our greenhouse gas emitters regulations expire September 1, and we want to see a seamless transition moving forward.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: To the same minister: what plans does your ministry have to reduce carbon emissions by further improving energy efficiency policies, including demand-side management? How will you be consulting Albertans on these often very personal choices, and what's your expected time frame for coming forward with these policies?

An Hon. Member: Forty years.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, it won't be 40 years. It will be a lot quicker than that.

I can say to you that we are looking at a wide range of options for energy efficiency, both commercial and residential. I'll be meeting with the tech fund board next week to talk about programs being in place immediately. Again, we understand that, you know, the eyes of the world are on us. As we look at market access and want to get our product to market, we understand that we have to be good environmental stewards. We'll meet that challenge.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: My final question is to the Minister of Energy. Following our budget review last night and her indication that the alternative and renewable framework is going forward, which everyone is very excited about, I'd like some more information for my constituents about the process for engagement and how the public will be able to understand what's going on.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Certainly, I have a round-table that I've organized for next week to talk to our stakeholders that are very interested in the A and R framework. I want to hear from them first within our energy-only market, electricity market, how they may see, first and foremost, how A and R may come through. [interjections] Then after we have that engagement, we'll have further discussion with regard to Albertans on that. First and

foremost, those that are very interested directly are stakeholders. I want to get feedback from them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'd prefer you listen to the questions and the answers. The noise level is rising up a bit. It's been not too bad. Let's bring it back down. If you must converse amongst yourselves, do so quietly or go outside the Chamber.

Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Sherwood Park.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we revealed that a quarter million dollar contract was awarded to an AHS executive the day after she retired. The contract wasn't tendered but simply handed to her, no questions asked. Records show that the company set up by this exec was established on August 4, 2011, while she was still an AHS employee. Of course, doing business with a current employee is a no-no, so AHS waited until the clock struck midnight on quitting day before giving her the contract. Has the minister taken the time to review this information? Does he share Albertans' concerns, and if so, what is he going to do to fix it?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I don't share and what my colleagues don't share is conjecture and a rush to judgment about either the value of someone's work or the circumstances under which they acquire that work. We start from the position that there are rules in place and that those rules have been observed. I have inquired about this situation with the office of the official administrator, and I'm waiting to hear from him. But I want to be very, very clear: these hon. members have presented exactly no evidence to suggest that anything here is untoward.

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, minister. Just read the FOIP.

Given that yesterday in response to our question AHS didn't deny the fact, they didn't apologize, and, in fact, they vigorously defended it because shockingly – shockingly – the contract was apparently awarded in full compliance with policy, does the minister agree that a policy that allows the gifting of a quarter of a million dollars to an executive who retired the day before is a pretty shoddy policy that needs to be revised?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is, as I indicated, that I'm in some discussion now with the official administrator about this. What I did learn yesterday, that I think all members would be interested in, is that \$200 million of that \$250 million in consulting contracts was for IT systems, IT systems that consolidated the former health regions into one, that saved this organization \$660 million in administrative savings over a similar period. I think that's a pretty good return on investment.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'll tell you what a good return on investment for your IT is. Wait till we bring forward the whistle-blower.

Given that reports say that the same former executive still has executive coaching contracts on the books, does the minister actually believe executive coaching is a priority for Albertans?

Mr. Horne: What I believe, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a responsibility as elected representatives not to use this Chamber to besmirch the reputation of any employee, whether they're a senior executive or front-line staff, and not to run roughshod with conjecture about policies and procedures that, obviously, the questioner doesn't understand. As I said, I've inquired with the official administrator about this particular contract. I will satisfy

myself as minister that the appropriate rules have been followed in this case, and I thank the hon. member not to use this Chamber inappropriately for that purpose.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That's what points of order are for, if necessary.

Strathcona Community Hospital

Ms Olesen: Mr. Speaker, my constituents have been waiting many years for a hospital to serve the nearly 100,000 residents of Sherwood Park and Strathcona county. While it is good news that the new facility is finally ready to open, there are some concerns with whether this facility is actually a hospital and whether there will actually be an increase in services. To the Minister of Health: how can you call this a hospital given the fact that it will only provide limited emergency services and that residents of our community that need care for more than 24 hours will be taken to facilities in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'd certainly like to begin by thanking the hon. member and her colleague the hon. Associate Minister – Seniors for their advocacy. They have worked very hard to bring this project to completion.

This is a \$130 million project that will see some of the most advanced care that's provided in our province. The facility is in fact an approved hospital or will be designated by myself as an approved hospital under the Hospitals Act. It includes many features, most notably a 24/7 emergency department supported by 27 beds, something the community identified as their highest priority.

Ms Olesen: To the same minister: what kinds of services are being provided at this facility, and how are they different from what we have now?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a growing number of places but relatively few places across the province that will offer the range of services that will be available at the Strathcona community hospital. In addition to the 24/7 emergency department, the hospital will feature a CT scanner, ultrasound, and X-ray services. There will be a number of outpatient specialty clinics that will eliminate the need for residents to come into Edmonton to receive those services. IV therapy, women's health, teen health, and seniors' health are among the other programs that will be offered.

Ms Olesen: Finally, to the same minister: my constituents are adamant about the importance of phase 2 of this hospital. Will there be a reconsideration of phase 2 of the hospital as Sherwood Park's population continues to grow?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. member would understand that when we undertake studies for health facilities, we seek to build health facilities that will meet the needs of residents today and well into the future. We believe we have accomplished that with the Strathcona community hospital. We do have room on the site for future expansion if and when a need is determined for additional services to be made available. But I can't stress enough how much this model of care represents the state of the art in 2014 and takes us a long way from the traditional hospital model of the 1970s and '80s.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Traffic Court Reform Initiative

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know this Justice minister is considering some radical new changes to Alberta's traffic court system. Under a so-called New Age plan citizens accused of traffic offences will no longer have the right to appear before a court. Officers who issue tickets will no longer have to attend hearings, and no evidence would ever need to be called into question. Albertans from across the province are sounding the alarm against this minister's plan, saying that it's an attack on their basic, fundamental civil liberties and rights. To the minister: why are you so insistent on taking away the rights of Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, virtually nothing that that member said here is actually true. We've just embarked on a consultation, which ended March 31, asking people, asking traffic commissioners, lawyers, police officers, the public at large what their experience has been with traffic court. We're tabulating the responses, but there's only one thing that we've decided. You'll always have the right to fight a traffic ticket in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that under the minister's proposed changes anyone challenging a traffic violation would appear before a government-appointed adjudicator, not a court, and any further appeals would be heard by an administrative tribunal, not an appeals court, how can the minister guarantee that this new process will treat Albertans with the same procedural fairness and equality that the courts would afford?

Mr. Denis: I'm not sure that this member heard my answer the first time. There have been no decisions made as to traffic court reform other than the fact that you will have the ability to fight a traffic court ticket in Alberta, period. We will look at some different changes, Mr. Speaker, but none of that has been decided, so this member can stop this fearmongering.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that under the minister's proposed changes rules of evidence and procedure as well as a presumption of innocence and a right to face your accuser would no longer apply and given that experts from across the province resoundingly say that these changes will violate the basic rights and civil liberties of Albertans and encourage them to plead guilty, will the minister do the right thing, listen to Albertans, and reverse course on his outrageous plan today?

2:20

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the same question and again the same answer. There's nothing that's been decided other than the fact that Albertans will always have the right to fight a traffic court ticket. The one thing I'll let this member know is that since 2008 in this province with more and more people, who keep moving to this province because the government is so good, what has happened is that in some cases you've seen traffic court lead times increase more and more and more, about two and a half times in the city of Calgary alone. It's about access to justice. This member still practises law. Maybe he should know about that. [interjections]

The Speaker: At this time we'll move on, please. Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I know where all of the government's communications money is going. It's going to invent a new language in the Justice ministry under their proposed traffic court reform. The old guilty plea that used to go on your record along with demerit points will be called a discounted fine. A person who is not a judge or a JP is called an adjudicator, but they can't judge or adjudicate anything. A breach of natural justice is now called efficiency. To the Minister of Justice: why is the traffic reform written so that people believe they can still challenge a ticket in traffic court when, in fact . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't sure that this temperament was in the Wildrose caucus. It's quite interesting about that. Notwithstanding that, I'll say again, for the fourth time today, that the only thing that is not being considered is the right to fight a traffic ticket. Currently the system uses very few judges. They use justices of the peace and traffic court commissioners. I don't know if this member or other members have issue with that at all. Procedural fairness as well as the right to fight a traffic ticket in Alberta is not at issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that for the most part, the majority part, minor traffic offences are not in criminal courts – they are in the traffic court system – and given that courtrooms in Alberta sit empty for lack of judges, clerks, and prosecutors, why does the minister's consultation document indicate that his new model would free up criminal case courtrooms? [interjections]

Mr. Denis: I'll tell you why . . .

The Speaker: I wonder if we could just keep the noise level down, okay? I appreciate that there is a good question.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, come on.

The Speaker: Now, I don't care if you're offended or not, Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: I know you don't. They're just clapping.

The Speaker: I'm trying to tell you that I just would like the noise level brought down. If not, then you'll have to forfeit a question.

Let's have an answer, please.

Mr. Denis: In one word, Mr. Speaker, because it will. Often traffic measures can be heard before a Provincial Court judge, particularly outside of Calgary and Edmonton because there simply isn't the volume there. On top of that, matters in traffic court that deal with Charter appeals or deal with criminal offences are already heard before a Provincial Court judge. On top of that, they still use the same buildings, the same security, the same court clerk staff. If this member would like a tour of the courthouse, I'd be happy to arrange that for her.

Ms Blakeman: No. I understand the difference between the two courts. That's okay.

Back to the same minister: what does the minister have up his sleeve next? We've already had property taken away, like an innocent grandma's condo, and sold on the basis of suspicion of

illegal activity; people pleading guilty in order to get their licences restored and to get their car back in less than a year; and now a proposal to take away a person's day in court. Mr. Minister, what's next? [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: You know, what I find particularly offensive is when I've just asked for something to be done and then you purposefully ignore it and go up even higher over the top. Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, for example, you were the loudest. I'm sorry, but I find that highly offensive, and if it happens again, I'm going to have to deal with you. Okay?

Mr. Anderson: Point of clarification.

The Speaker: A point of clarification has been noted. Let's finish up. [interjection]

Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of clarification has been noted, all right? Sit down and zip it up. [interjection] Sit down and zip it up. I'm not having a debate with you.

Let's go on with the answer.

Traffic Court Reform Initiative (continued)

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What's next is that we as a government will continue to build upon our record of access to justice but also procedural fairness and improving court times and looking after safe communities. Many of those things this member had already alluded to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Misericordia Community Hospital

Mr. Eggen: Thanks.

Some Hon. Members: Shh.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, no. I want a little bit of noise. Come on, you guys.

At the Misericordia hospital it's not just sewage leaks and faulty gas lines. On average twice a day staff are forced into crisis overcapacity management. Documents that Alberta New Democrats released today show that the Mis was running over capacity almost 600 times in the last 14 months. Almost every day this hospital is either out of space, understaffed, or both. To the Minister of Health: Edmontonians find this situation completely unacceptable. Why don't you do something about it?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are and have been working with Covenant Health for some time to address the issues at the Misericordia. I can't count the number of times now that I've been asked and have answered these questions in the House. A \$19.2 million commitment to critical infrastructure repair at the Misericordia is a major commitment, knowing, of course, that there is a limit to the remaining useful life of this facility. It is one of the oldest facilities in the province. It is also in one of the highest demand areas of the province. We will continue to invest the dollars that are necessary to keep things operational at the Misericordia.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that overcapacity means five patients in a room, overcapacity means that not all the essential equipment is available that patients need, and overcapacity means many more patients for the same amount of staff, can this minister then explain why, yet again, funding to start building a new Misericordia hospital is missing from this year's budget?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, one thing I want to make very clear – and I certainly acknowledge the infrastructure issues at the Misericordia, and I have thanked the staff in the past, and I will thank them again for their ability to cope with those particular challenges. But at no time has the quality of care that is delivered at the Misericordia hospital been in question. It is not in question today. It was not in question a year ago. It was not in question 10 years ago. We see demands at the Misericordia that we see at other major hospitals across the province. The short-term issues have been addressed by a \$19 million commitment. The bigger issues of new hospital capacity for Edmonton . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that overcapacity is chronic at the Misericordia hospital and this government has put in no plan to build that capacity, can you really blame Edmontonians for suspecting that this PC government has no intention to build a new, west-end, full-service, active treatment hospital now or in the foreseeable future?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the plans that we have under way are the same plans that I've described in answers to previous questions. We are looking at infrastructure hospital needs for Edmonton and for the capital region today. The issues around infrastructure at the Misericordia are serious issues. They are short-term issues. The longer term planning is well under way, as I've said, for the Edmonton zone. We will be looking at opportunities across the capital region that we need to capitalize on. In the short term our commitment to the Misericordia stands.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Infrastructure Planning and Maintenance

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of November the Good Shepherd elementary school in Edmonton was listed as having a good facility condition rating by Alberta Infrastructure, yet – yet – the roof was leaking and dangerous black mould was growing. This government's negligence resulted in students' learning being disrupted as they were forced to relocate. This comes on the heels of sewer backups at the Wainwright hospital and significant deficiencies at the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton. Will the minister of black mould and sewer backups tell Albertans why these are not government priorities? [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Really? Really, hon. member? How old are we? Do you want to rephrase that question in a proper way, or would you like me to just shut it down right now?

Mr. Barnes: Will the minister responsible for the black mould and the sewer backup please tell Albertans why this isn't important?

The Speaker: I assume there is some minister here who knows what he is talking about. Go ahead and answer, Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for pointing out in the course of his question the wide range of infrastructure that this government provides for the citizens of Alberta: many schools, many hospitals, and many other things. Part of that process is to get the most life out of those facilities that we can. The other part is to look after them. The hon. member does point out a legitimate problem at the Good Shepherd school. We are working on it. He is right to point out that it has caused some disruptions. The fact is that we're dealing with it, and we'll get the kids back in the classroom. It's an important issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Talk is cheap. Given that this school was rated as good and given that by this government's own standards students were sentenced to attend a school infested with black mould for an unknown amount of time, will the minister explain why this government prioritized \$250 million on PR consultants rather than providing a safe environment for our children and our students?

Mr. McIver: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member pointed out that we had the children out, so we did provide a safe environment. What we're sentencing Alberta children to are new classrooms, improved classrooms, classrooms that he and his party wouldn't be building if they were here. [interjections] We're building Alberta. We're putting the infrastructure in place because Alberta's kids matter. We have done that, and we'll continue to do that as part of building Alberta. The member should get onboard. His constituents might even appreciate the support for the schools that they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member, as soon as the rest your caucus silences a bit, why don't you proceed with your final statement.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, we would build and balance the budget.

Given that this government has not been a good shepherd to the students at Good Shepherd elementary or a good steward of Alberta's provincial infrastructure, when will this PC government eliminate the \$817 million in deferred maintenance to the province's schools and the over \$1 billion in deferred maintenance to our hospitals?

Mr. McIver: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, Albertans will want to know that our operating budget is fully balanced.

The hon. member talks about what they'd do, but their plan has a \$4 billion hole in it that they cannot explain. Our government, meanwhile, continues to build new infrastructure and look after the old infrastructure. I can tell the hon. member and all Albertans that we will never be fully caught up on our infrastructure repairs because Alberta keeps growing. We keep building new things, and we keep going back and repairing the old ones. It's a process that won't end, and thank goodness we're here to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Land Annexation Process

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the city of Edmonton arbitrarily announced that it was planning to acquire some 38,000 acres of Leduc county, including the International Airport, by a hostile annexation bid. This move would gut the economic base of Leduc county and affect the bottom line of the

city of Leduc. As well, it would stifle the future expansion of Nisku industrial park. It's all being done in the name of subsidizing Edmonton residential tax rates. My constituents are angry. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can Edmonton just wave its fingers and make this happen, and will you allow it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question. As the province continues to grow, we're seeing incredible growth pressures on all of our municipalities: our big cities, our mid-size cities, and other communities. As part of that, annexations are becoming more and more of a reality. No one can wave their fingers and create an annexation. It is an incredibly complex process that requires the discussion of all the parties, including the municipalities and the landowners, to come to agreement on how this can proceed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: Mr. Minister, what can my constituents do to have their voices heard in order to express their utter displeasure and opposition to this tax grab by the city of Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time there has been no annexation application made by the city of Edmonton. Any municipality wanting to annex land needs to negotiate with the other municipality. They've got to consult the public. They've got to consult the landowners. Anyone objecting to any one of these can file an objection with the Municipal Government Board.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: Mr. Minister, what measures are you taking to bring some sanity to this process and to find a reasonable solution?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is actually a very long and complex procedure, and it does require the parties to work together. Nobody will be making a quick annexation of anything without properly negotiating and working with all of their neighbours to ensure that all of the municipalities are treated fairly through the process.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-East.

Life Skills Education and Training

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's rapidly growing economy is both a blessing and a challenge. For people who know how to work and want to, there are plenty of choices. For employers looking for help, there's a chronic shortage in some areas. They've told trade schools: you're doing a good job teaching apprentices how to perform trade tasks, but some lack life skills. Would the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour please tell us what's being done to help in this area?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal government and our provincial government are working very closely at making sure that the skill gap that exists in our country right now is

narrowed as much as possible because it is our common number one priority that all jobs that are being made available in Canada should be made available to Canadians first. But in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Services there are a number of programs like Women Building Futures that we have in place, where we not only bring unemployed Albertans to employability but provide them with the wraparound services that allow them to stay employed and help them to deal with some of the life issues that they may be facing at this point in time.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that employers and their customers need associates who know how to show up for work on time, are reliable and trustworthy, are self-motivated, and have the capacity to learn, what is the Education minister doing to see that high school students have these characteristics by the time they graduate?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a great question. There are a number of things happening, including some of the great programs that are in our high schools in terms of the dual crediting programs we've just announced here this last year, where industry and K to 12 and postsecondary were blurring the lines between those: the RAP programs, the career and technology studies, and the career and life management skills program, which is high school. Really, it's about relevant learning to make sure that kids are prepared to enter into that global economy, which is one of the reasons that we actually want to talk to the global economy players as we develop our education system, which is another step we're taking.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that children need to learn to be accountable for the consequences of their choices, does the minister think a curriculum redesign could be modified to include ensuring that all graduates from high school have the life skills necessary to prepare them for postsecondary education and employment in the real world?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think that's a very good point, Mr. Speaker, and it's absolutely one of the things that Albertans have asked us to look at and one of the reasons that we want a broad perspective from Albertans as we do some of the curriculum and ongoing work. Let's be clear. This is not inviting big oil to come in and write curriculum but letting all Albertans and people from the business community and those leaders that see what kind of skills our kids need or might be lacking to succeed once they get out of our education system. We're taking that very seriously, and we're listening to those views of parents and others around Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Little Bow.

Home Care

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent who has been trying to get home care for her sick husband, who is 92 years old. It took five days for her to speak with home care, and she was told it is a two-months-plus waiting time for an in-home assessment. Even when an emergency request was put in by an emergency room doctor, it took a week for someone to contact her. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health. How is this acceptable in this great province of ours?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, while I can't speak to the specific situation the hon. member has raised, I would certainly agree it is not acceptable. What I can tell him is that on average clients are seen for home-care referrals within two to five days, and of course when an immediate need is identified, the prospective client for home care is seen immediately. Often these assessments take place in the hospital prior to discharge. As the hon. member points out, it's very, very important that we also pay close attention to community referrals, that Alberta Health Services receives every day.

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you.
Hon. member, first sup.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to fix this obviously broken system?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't necessarily agree that the system is broken. What I would tell the hon. member is that Alberta has increased home-care funding by 25 per cent since 2010. I would venture to say that that's among the highest increases you would find anywhere in Canada. I can also tell the hon. member that the number of home-care clients in 2012-13 was over 108,000 province-wide. This is a challenge that we face as a province that's growing rapidly, and we do need to work to improve the timeliness of care.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, if it's not broken, it's not working properly. So how can we expect the home-care service to be operating the way it is intended to and that those in need will be receiving the service that they desperately require?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely, the majority of patients across the province and all patients who need care urgently, including home care, are receiving that care. Obviously, in the case of this hon. member's constituent the timeliness of the service was lacking, and I'd be pleased to look into that one individual case for the hon. member. But it's important to note, as with other health care services, that home care is delivered on the basis of the urgency of the client's needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day Program

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go on with private members' statements, could I just draw your attention to the MLA for a Day brochure that was put onto your desks? We are undersubscribed at the moment, the same as we were last year. Only 34 out of 87 constituencies are represented at the moment. I'm sorry, but the deadline is actually tomorrow, so if you could get something to us, we could maybe hold it till Monday or something along that line. Please do your best to publicize this program again. Thank you.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements, starting with Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, your member's statement.

AISH Wait Times

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are roughly 46,000 Albertans receiving AISH. In 2012 the province increased those benefits by \$400 per month. This was especially helpful in my constituency. The cost of living in Fort McMurray far outstrips anywhere else in the province. However, I spoke to agencies and recipients in my area and was told that the length of time to qualify for AISH can be up to a year, depending on the worker assigned, and that even then they may be denied.

I was told about a single mom currently supporting her family on \$400 child-support payments while she waits, and she applied months ago.

Many of you know my chief of staff, Nickola Walker. Nicky works hard supporting me and the Member for Calgary-Foothills. She sits on numerous boards and is generally just a busy body. You may also know that she and her partner, Patrick, have four beautiful children. As Nicky says: they keep us hopping. Well, what you might not know is that Nicky's mother, Virginia Hoffarth, from Monarch seemingly suffered a stroke in September. It was later determined that she developed late-onset MS. Virginia is no longer able to drive a school bus, which she did lovingly for many years. She cannot perform her previous job as a RITE operator at the Claesholm care centre, a position that she held for over a decade. She finds her illness has greatly decreased her ability to perform even simple functions.

So Virginia sought AISH funding. She didn't want to. She's a proud southern Albertan who doesn't believe in money for nothing. But the excessive length of time to qualify has left Nicky's family financially supporting her.

The Member for Little Bow has also tried to help. He visited them, wrote letters, and made many calls, but it seems nothing has helped. Virginia's AISH worker has said that they're five to six months behind. Virginia, luckily, has a family who is able to come out and help where they can.

But what about other Albertans who do not have that assistance? I worry that these most vulnerable Albertans are waiting such excessive periods to receive funding. While I applaud the decision to increase the payments to AISH recipients, what good is it if people can't actually get it?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, did you have a notice of motion you wanted to give today regarding written questions, perhaps motions for returns for next week?

Mr. Denis: Yes.

The Speaker: Do please proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to advise the House that on Monday, April 14, 2014, written questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 as well as 15 up to and including Written Question 41 will be accepted. I further advise this House that written questions 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 14 will be dealt with.

Also, on Monday, April 14, 2014, motions for returns 2, 3, 7, and 8 will be accepted, and motions for returns 1, 4, 5, and 6 will be dealt with at that juncture.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of.

Bill 7

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed act will amend our personal and corporate income tax acts to accommodate technical and administrative changes that parallel federal government changes that have been a long time coming. The proposed legislation also implements a tax regime for qualifying environmental trusts to help facilitate the accumulation of funds for future reclamation of pipeline and oil sands sites. These are revenue-neutral changes and will encourage the creation of trusts here in Alberta, where the majority of pipeline and oil sands activities occur.

Proposed changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act will prevent unintended tax increases resulting from federal changes to the dividend tax credit system. Other amendments are for housekeeping purposes that preserve the integrity of our tax system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 205

Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 205 would increase the fines and/or impose imprisonment on individuals perpetrating excessive abuse or neglect of animals. I've heard from many in my community as well as across Alberta that the horrible acts of animal owners such as those that occurred in Calgary in January of this year and the horrible loss of Quanto, the police dog, as well as many others do not carry a stiff enough penalty. I'm urging my colleagues to consider this bill. It sends a strong message that severe abuse and neglect will not be tolerated by Albertans. It is a moral and personal shameless audacity to see these horrible acts inflicted on the helpless and dependent animals that share our lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, are clear evidence the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both affordable and accessible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. On behalf of my colleague for Calgary-Buffalo I'd like to table copies of a media report around a young man who tried to start a gay-straight alliance at his high school but, in fact, was turned down. The high school said, "It's simply philosophically not who we are, or how we come to be as a community that is in solidarity with everybody's need at the same time." It also mentions that the Education minister said that he wasn't aware of the boy's attempt to start the GSA.

The second two tablings that I have are related, Mr. Speaker. The first is a copy of the second-quarter report AHS Performance Dashboard Q2 from Alberta Health Services. These, obviously, are available internally but haven't been released externally until now. The second is the appropriate number of copies of the AHS measurement dashboard from the third quarter, which actually was the 1st of March 2014, but we'll release it now, in mid-April.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we had one point of clarification requested by Airdrie. He has since withdrawn his need for that to be responded to. We also had a point of order by the Minister of Justice, and he, too, has asked that that be withdrawn. Other than that, I have no other points of order, so we can move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Weadick]

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

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise as the Liberal opposition critic on Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014, and say happy things about it, which doesn't happen very often, so we should all celebrate. [some applause] Thank you very much.

You know, I was very keen about the new home warranty program when it first came out because I'd campaigned for it for a long time, five or six years. What we were finding was that with the normal warranty period that was granted to single-family homes but in my case to condominium buildings or to multifamily buildings, to townhouse sorts of accommodation, or even to multifamily rental buildings, the warranty would run out before the problems were discovered because the problems were often internal and pretty severe.

We are still finding condos that have discovered that their balconies or their windows were leaking and that the water is

running internally through the sort of wooden skeleton of the complex, and it's rotting out floors and the coverings on the decks and the walkways. By the time you figure this all out, it's a mess, and the people are having to pay for an inspector to come out and go: yeah, it's a mess. Then you've got to have people come out and tell you how much money they think they're going to have to charge you in order to fix this.

Honestly, it was just to the point of absurdity. People had the single biggest purchase of their lives. They'd gone out and bought this condo. It's everything they had. They're maxed out, you know, doing their condo fees and their mortgage payment, and then they find out that there's going to have to be an additional assessment; in other words, an additional charge that they're going to have to pay because they are all going to have to come together as the owners of a building to help fix the building so they can keep living in it.

It'll be familiar to any of you that drive around in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre because those are the buildings that are sort of sheathed in these scaffoldings and the drop tarps while they tear all the balconies off or take all the windows out and put them all back in again. It is millions and millions of dollars. So the effect is that the assessment to those individuals was ranging from – I think the lowest one I ever heard was \$8,000. I heard \$30,000 a lot, and somebody got way up there to kind of \$70,000 or \$80,000. I can't imagine how you would manage to pay for that on top of your fees and your living expenses and your mortgage.

It was really important to me that we as leaders and legislators come up with a program that was going to be able to be used by groups like my condo owners that discovered the problems long after the one-year warranty. This New Home Buyer Protection Act really went a long way to satisfying that, and I was really happy to see it. Thank you very much.

There was a delay in putting it into place, which I dutifully groused about in trying to get the government to speed up on implementing it. I think it was a six-month delay in actually proclaiming the bill. But now it turns out that as they started to work through the regulations – for those of you following along at home, God bless you, but also remember that the act, the legislation, or the statute as it's called once it's been passed, is the bigger picture design of what's supposed to happen. The regulations are the nitty-gritty, the how of how it all happens.

Once they started to work through designing the regulations and hearing back from some of the people that were going to have to be implementing that, they started to discover that there were a few places that were just not really clear. For example, when does it start? "Well, when you've paid for it. No. Wait. When you move in. Well, wait. Not everybody gets to move in when they've paid for it, and not everybody has paid for it when they move in." That wasn't quite working, so they went: "You know what? We really do need a really firm, written-in-legislation deadline of when this program starts." Good. Okay. Fair enough.

Another thing that's in here is renaming it from I think a warranty period to a protection period. Okay. To a layperson like me that sounds like semantics. But "protection period": I got that. Okay. Fine. If that helps everybody, go for it.

Mr. Speaker, I have to tease just the tiniest little bit. As many times as I have said, "Don't take things out of the legislation and put it into regs," here we have them taking it out of regulations and putting it into legislation – so, tee-hee, sometimes it's a fun day – but, you know, done for a good reason. The sponsoring member, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, said in *Hansard* on page 330: "Adopts several rules already in place in the regulations. While these regulations are working well, adopting

them into the act provides a more permanent solution." Aren't those lovely words? So there you go. It can be done. I'll be sure to remember that the next time you decide to move it from legislation into regs. Sorry. That's a little bit of a sidebar, but, you know, I have to poke fun when I can.

We talked about the protection period, when it commences.

Now, there is kind of an odd thing in here, and I'm not quite sure why. Maybe when we get into committee, the minister could explain where this came from. It starts talking about a very funny section about apartment buildings and how it won't apply to an apartment building as long as the apartment owner doesn't sell anything. I'm thinking: what does this have to do with the price of tea in China? If the sponsoring minister would be so kind as to – here it is: "Exempt apartments must have a rental use designation registered on their land title." It will say "that the apartment building has no insurance." Does that mean that they're going to be able to qualify under this warranty or not qualify under this warranty – I'm sorry – protection plan? I just don't understand why you've got apartment buildings in here. It was meant to be for people that owned things. The expansion to one person who owns an apartment building and then having exceptions about it is striking me as a bit out of step with the rest of what the act is about, which is single-family homeowners and multi-unit homeowners, condo owners in other words.

3:00

I'm sorry. While I'm at it, Mr. Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs, if I could just remind you all that we are still waiting for legislation on life leases. There was a point where the previous Member for Little Bow was bringing forward a private member's bill, and that's got to be three or four years ago now. If I could just remind you that we are still waiting for that. Life lease accommodation continues to be built. It is completely without legislation, and it is sort of sitting out there in a nether land, and it's becoming increasingly difficult for people around how they file their taxes, for example, and some pretty critical things like that.

Just so that you all know what I'm talking about, in the same way that condominiums sit halfway in between single-family homes and apartments in that you own it and you own that little piece of land but you own things in common with other people because you're living in a multi-unit building – so that sets condos sort of in between single-family homes and apartment buildings – life leases sit sort of on the other side of apartment buildings. People are putting money forward, significant money, hundreds of thousands of dollars, to bring down the cost for the builder of the complex so that they're not paying borrowing costs. The builder can build bigger, nicer units, a nicer place, for less money, and the people that have kind of advanced this money to them can move in, have a bigger, nicer place. When they die or move out, they get their initial investment, no interest, back. In the meantime they've paid a sort of maintenance fee as they go along.

Lots of those people get in there, and they think they're condo owners. They think they have control over the colour of the carpet in the hallways and whether there's going to be a food prep area or not, and they don't because they're not condo owners. They don't own the whole complex, but they've contributed towards it. So you see how this starts to get – so, please, please, I'll put in another plea that you work on developing some legislation around that, because it really has been a very long time. You can call me tangent girl.

Back to Bill 6. You know, I've gone through all of the different sections. It's being described as sort of minor administration and technical, which is actually a pretty good term for it. It is things

like changing it to a protection period and identifying exactly when everything starts. There's rental use designation, which is the one I was questioning on. That's a new piece that's been added in. That's actually quite a big new piece. I talked about the start date for the warranty coverage. It's empowering the registrar to determine which buildings qualify as a new home under this, when a penalty can be appealed, and whether somebody has to pay it and then get it back and what the deal with that is.

So it's just a lot of little, small things that are needed to make this whole thing operate better. Since I was so darn keen on having it in the first place, there's nothing being done here that I disagree with. I really want this program to work. It's really important to my constituents in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre and, in fact, to everybody in Alberta who's buying a new home, whether it's a condo or single-family or semidetached. It's a lot – a lot – of money, your biggest expenditure in your life. For many people it could well be their primary home for most of their life. I mean, my dad is still living in the house that he built on my mother's design in 1955. He's still there. He will have lived in that house for the greatest part of his life, and I dearly hope that he dies in that house, which would just be really nice for him.

You know, considering that, I'm glad to see that work has continued on this bill and that people are paying attention to the minutiae, which I always appreciate. Good work. My thanks to the people in the department that worked on this. I really appreciate your effort, and I think you've done a nice job there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I urge everyone to vote in favour of second reading of Bill 6.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and if there are others, please let me know. Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise also to support this bill in principle. I won't speak for the entire caucus, but I think the majority supported the bill when it originally came forward. The whole idea of having liability insurance is a good thing. I don't think anyone's arguing that. But there have been some injustices as a result of the rapid pace of passing the bill, and I'm hoping the minister can correct it on the amending bill. I'm going to point it out.

In this bill here, the amending bill, particularly on page 8, part 6, that is dealing with section 4, it's good to see those changes that are now really detailing that a residential builder should ensure that the building or the structure is free from what defects. That's a good thing.

But where the injustice comes for the homeowner-builder, the one that qualifies for the exemption – and I'll put it into context. I had a chance to talk to some contractors who are in agreement with the bill. They pay a \$90 fee to register their properties. The contractor I spoke to pays roughly \$1,200 per \$500,000 home that he builds, and that's a rough figure. He thinks that's actually quite reasonable. That cost gets passed along in the sale of the home.

What I found out is that under the original bill section 5 just said that there will be a fee that will be set in regulation for the homeowner-builder, that will be exempt from the liability portion. Now, of course, we all know that if they sell that house before the 10 years are up, then they have to go get liability. So if they don't do that up front, they'll probably pay more for that liability four years, five years down the road if they want to sell. I still think that's a good idea. But where the real penalty is here is that if you are exempt, the fee to register your property for this registrar is set at \$750. What does that give you if you're exempt? You're more

than halfway there for the liability insurance in the first place. So in comparison to the contractor, who only pays \$90 to register, there's a great disparity and unfairness.

Now, speaking for those homeowner-builders, which I have a lot of in the rural area, they do not plan on selling their home. They plan on living on their family property for the rest of their lives. Yet they're paying a fee considerably more than anyone else just to register their property. That seems so unfair.

So in principle the bill itself, the original bill, I thought was good. It's why I supported it. I think we rushed it through. I don't know if we did a thorough consultation. I did hear a lot of feedback from contractors that didn't know about it. I understand that. I know that when I saw the amending bill come forward, I talked to some contractors. They had no idea that the changes were coming. But here we are dealing with the same situation. We are amending a bill that came through quite quickly.

Mr. Speaker, we need to correct the disparities and make sure the playing field is fair. That amendment to cap or to set a standard fee for registration, in my view, should be universal. To have a contractor pay \$90 to register properties but a homeowner pay \$750 to register a piece of property seems unjust to me. I think we can balance that out. I think it's reasonable and fair that if everyone had to pay \$90, that might be a little bit more palatable to the homeowner-builders.

3:10

Now where I stumbled upon this. Quite a reputable architect in my area, who I believe is building a home for his daughter, or it might be for himself, ran across this as they were subdividing property. It's the typical situation. His question was a question that I could not answer, which is: what does \$750 get me? The truth be known, it's nothing other than that it registers the property, that costs somebody else \$90.

I think if we could correct that – and there are places in this bill that an amendment could be brought forward to make sure the regulations are consistent. I notice there are a number of places, particularly in section 8 of the original bill, which is page 9 of this amending bill. We could direct the registrar fees to be a set fee, and then it's in legislation, or we could set it as equal. There are a number of ways the bill could be worded to make it fair. That's what we're looking for, just to make it fair.

Hopefully, the minister will take that under consideration, and we can have not just unanimous support for the bill but no questions remaining behind. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. Is there anyone wishing to take advantage of that?

I see no one, so let's go on to Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Bilous: All right. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to second reading of Bill 6, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014. At the onset I do need to mention that what's unfortunate about this amendment act is that we shouldn't have to be here right now debating this. Had the government accepted many of the amendments that were proposed by the Alberta NDP on strengthening the act last year, the first time that this came to the House, we wouldn't be in here debating something that, like I said, should have been included in the act at the onset. It is worth noting that this legislation was rushed last year. I know that we were debating a couple of the readings quite late into the evening.

The greater frustration is that most of what the bill is amending and proposing to do – again, you know, the Alberta NDP put forward several amendments last year, and the PC Party voted all of them down. It seems a little foolish that we're back here a year later. I guess they finally maybe reread our amendments or took a year to understand them. I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I want to say that at least now they are strengthening an act that actually was full of a few holes. I think it is important that the bill takes some positive steps towards addressing the issue of condo occupancy and common facilities in the buildings, which was an issue that we raised as well as the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Again, you know, a question that I would love to ask the minister is – I hope that he could answer; I appreciate that he wasn't the minister last year, when this act came through – why didn't we or could we not have addressed these issues last year, when the bill was initially tabled in the House, as we had tried to do?

This one amendment means that coverage will begin for condos only at the point when permission to occupy has been given and the first unit is occupied. The defining of common facilities, again, is a positive step in this bill. One of the major issues that comes with condo ownership, Mr. Speaker, is who's responsible for paying for things that are considered common facilities such as the building envelope or the load-bearing structures. These amendments allow for some clarity on those issues, which I think is positive.

Again, we were advocating – and we still are – for the length of coverage, increasing the time period of coverage. The greatest concern that the Alberta NDP raised when this bill first came to the floor last year was that the length of coverage included, in our opinion, is still not long enough to adequately protect our new home owners. Prior to the debate last year we had done some consultation with experts, who raised concerns about the two coverage periods, specifically the one-year coverage for defects and materials and labour and the five-year coverage for defects in the building envelope. Now, our position and what experts were telling us is that one year is very little time to determine if defects in material or labour are present, you know, sometimes taking into consideration that it takes homeowners several months to move into their new residence. Obviously, the clock is now playing against them.

Our proposal was to extend the minimum coverage for defects to at least two years, which, again, I don't think was asking too much. We're extending that coverage for an extra year, which gives new homeowners adequate time if there are defects in labour or materials. Now, this somewhat addresses the protection period's starting at an earlier date. Both time of purchase and time of occupancy could be included as the start date, which might give a little more elbow room for homeowners.

As well, as far as the consultation we did with experts on defects in the building envelope, they've stated to us, Mr. Speaker, that it could take as long as 10 years or even longer for defects in the building envelope to become apparent. So that's where our position came from, really, from industry saying to us, you know, that 10 years is an adequate coverage time.

I think that those two requests, or strengthening, are reasonable and, again, would mean that we don't need to come back to this bill a third time in another year from now when we learn that homeowners aren't getting adequate length of coverage from even these amendments.

At the moment, though, what we're proposing is that instead of having the option for homeowners to purchase additional coverage for the building envelope or other defects, which I'm sure the minister will talk about when we get into committee – again, our question is: why can't we just extend the mandatory coverage

period instead? It is interesting. If we're giving homeowners the option of purchasing additional coverage or extension, does that mean that we already know that the minimum period that's being covered in this bill is not long enough? I mean, wouldn't it make sense, if the purpose of this is really to protect homeowners, to just extend the length of protection?

Even though the amendments in this bill clarify the protection period or the exemption for properties that will be exclusively rented, there are still some issues that may arise out of this, Mr. Speaker. Properties that are built with the sole purpose of renting can be exempt from obtaining insurance prior to building. Now, this may leave those who are renting in trouble should any problems arise with the building. Though they will have to pay out of pocket for repairs, they still run the risks of having rents raised in order to recoup the costs incurred by the building owner due to costly repairs.

Mr. Speaker, we still want this legislation, obviously, to do what it's advertised to do, which is to protect homeowners. Conversely, this legislation should not in any way be a protective mechanism for incompetent home builders or companies that serve to benefit greatly through this legislation as warranty providers. During the debate on the original bill, I mean, we were endorsing the spirit of the legislation, and we need to make sure that it's strong enough to protect the interest of consumers and that time periods stipulated are in accordance with expert recommendations. Again, our data is backed up through experts in the field and through consultations that we've had with builders. My hope for this bill is that it will in fact strengthen the existing bill, ensuring that homeowners have more protection.

What's interesting is that the minimum-level warranty coverage in Alberta is \$265,000 on a new home. Now, while that number is slightly higher than what's covered in other jurisdictions, the average price of a home in Alberta in January of 2012 was \$342,000, including land costs. I've just heard recently that, again, in the housing market in Edmonton, I believe, we're 4 per cent over what the highest rates were in 2007. If I'm not mistaken, the average value or price of a home is now over \$400,000. You know, I guess, one thing that I would like to see in this bill – and, hopefully, the government is amicable to amendments when we get into committee – is bumping up that number again, especially in light of the fact that our housing values and costs are continuing to rise at an extremely rapid rate within our province here.

3:20

Let's see here. During the last round of debates on this bill we talked about the issue of ensuring that all buyers are protected and one of the problems that can arise from building inspections and the need for greater clarity in legislative power in this aspect. My colleague from Edmonton-Calder had talked about the fact that provincial inspectors were eliminated back in 1993, and that was a significant setback to the integrity of the building system. I think, you know, looking at addressing inspectors and inspections is another way to strengthen protection for homebuyers.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I just want to wrap up by saying that the Alberta NDP is going to be supporting these amendments, that strengthen the bill. However, it needs to be noted that this should have been done the first time through. We had amendments from the Alberta NDP and, I believe, from the other two opposition parties as well. Had the government slowed down the process of passing the legislation initially and looked at adopting the amendments, that actually were written in the best interests of homeowners, we wouldn't have to be here and wouldn't have to take the time to debate this bill and could be working on other pieces of legislation. I can say that I am

disappointed that the government did not accept our recommendations last year. I hope that they're willing to consider some of the amendments that are going to be put forward, if any, from the opposition side in this reading of the bill. The point, obviously, is: let's get it done, let's get it done right, and then we can move on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available.

I see no one. I have one person left on the list, and that is Calgary-Shaw. Please proceed.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to second reading of Bill 6 and will echo some of the comments made by previous members. The manner in which this government seems to be passing legislation right now is just a little surprising. It's clear that proper consultations were not done on this bill. It's the only plausible reason why we would find ourselves back here less than two years after this had already been passed with an amendment act to it. It speaks to, I guess, just the fly-by-night legislative process that seems to be happening with this government currently. It's very unfortunate that you can't do your work on the front end, and here we are again, fixing something that should have just been done right the first time.

It's clear that the stakeholders who were going to be impacted by the original act, the original bill, just were not properly consulted, and I would hope that this government takes this bill, this amendment act, as a bit of a lesson. They can use this to remind themselves of why it's important to get that work done before bringing an incomplete bill to the House.

Overall, I mean, the amendment act is solid. It's sound. There are a couple of concerns that we do have, that we're hearing around the whole program itself. I will address those, and perhaps the minister could comment, respond, and/or take some action on some of these areas.

One of the issues that we're having is that the owner-builders are required to get a warranty even if they are the contractor who would be providing remedial services should the home require warranty-covered repairs. We are in support of the owner-builder clause as it is now. I know the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre had some questions about the value-add for individuals, for owner-builders who are spending \$750, but we also understand that the reason for that is to level the playing field and ensure that all builders out there are reputable and doing good work and have product that is going to be sound. The question remains around warranty for contract and the owner-builder who is going to be doing the fixing themselves and how that whole piece fits together.

The second issue is around the warranty coverage that is being offered to owner-builders. We're under the impression that there are about five companies that do offer warranty coverage in the province. We're hearing that there are only two that will actually offer owner-builder warranties and that some of the time that's actually only one. If you could just look into the competitive process around those warranties for some of our owner-builders. They are concerned that if it is just something that starts to become monopolized if everyone gets out of the game, then that's just not a healthy system.

The third problem is that we're hearing that staff are severely overworked in trying to provide the administration of this program. They're doing a great job, but the comments that we've heard back in some of our consultations are that their concerns

weren't necessarily reaching the minister's office. Now, I know that we have a new minister on the file, so perhaps that will change, but their words were that they felt the minister is somewhat insulated about hearing some of the issues that they are having. Again, we're hoping that the new minister will ensure that that problem is taken care of.

The final issue is around the digital support for the program. It's suffering ongoing failure. We hear a number of stories of a number of residents across the province who are trying to access the system, and we have website crashes, insufficient materials online, and e-mail addresses that are nonresponsive or simply unavailable. It seems to be somewhat commonplace for this program. Again, I would just request that the minister consider and address some of these issues that the people who are trying to access the program and that are using the program are experiencing as we have heard here in the Official Opposition.

Overall, though, Mr. Speaker, the bill is good in principle. It would have been great to have a full and sufficient process for consultation prior to the initial bill being tabled rather than the sorely lacking process of passing legislation and experiencing crisis with implementation followed by an amending bill, but I will leave that as it is for now and move on.

I look forward to seeing this get past second reading, and we'll see how things go in committee. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Are there any other speakers?

If not, Minister of Municipal Affairs, would you like to close debate, then?

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be here to close debate on what I believe is a very important piece of legislation. Before I get started, I'd just like to take a moment to thank the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the insurance companies, the municipalities, and all of those others that came and worked with us and supported as we built the regulations to look at what some of the very, very specific issues are and helped us come up with some of the fixes. I'm very pleased to be here to say that some of these fixes should be in legislation, and they're going to be in legislation. That's why we're here today. I believe it's worth taking the time to be here today to do that. I'm proud to be here to do that.

I also want to thank the members for Edmonton-Centre – I think you had some great questions – Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and Calgary-Shaw. I will bring answers back to those questions at the start of Committee of the Whole and try to answer as many as I can. I look forward to the debate at that time.

With that, I would call the question on second reading.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that's the conclusion of business for today, and I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to April 10, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft.), 146-54 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 184-87 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 217-18 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 226-28 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 231-34 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2014; SA 2014 cS-2.5]

2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 84 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 154-56 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187-88 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c2]

3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)

First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143-45 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c3]

4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 145-46 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 184 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 191-93 (Mar. 11, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 229 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 250 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft.), 330 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 119 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 174 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 188-90 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 218-20 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 228-29 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 230 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c1]

6 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Hughes)

First Reading -- 300 (Mar. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 330-31 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft.), 417-21 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

7 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-34 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship)

202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 264-79 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., defeated on division)

203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act (Jablonski)

First Reading -- 249 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 352-61 (Apr. 7, 2014 aft., adjourned)

204 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014 (Barnes)

First Reading -- 263-64 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., passed)

205 Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014 (Webber)

First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, April 14, 2014

Issue 17

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 14, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray that our actions today result in improvements tomorrow for those whom we are pledged to serve in this Assembly. Amen.

This being Monday, I would ask you to please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem as led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Thank you, Mr. Clark. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a delegation of members and officials visiting Alberta from the state of Western Australia. The members are from the House of Assembly and from the state's second Chamber, known as the Legislative Council. They are only in Edmonton for a short time as they, unfortunately, have to leave tomorrow morning for Saskatchewan. They will then visit Victoria for meetings prior to returning to Australia. I'd like to welcome them to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, they're seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: the Hon. Barry House, MLC, President of the Legislative Council; Ms Wendy Duncan, MLA, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; Hon. Kate Doust, MLC, deputy leader of the opposition in the Legislative Council; Mr. Roger Cook, MLA, deputy leader of the opposition; Hon. Paul Brown, MLC; Dr. Graham Jacobs, MLA; Mr. Russell Bremner, executive manager, parliamentary services department; Mr. Nigel Pratt, Clerk of the Legislative Council; and Ms Kirsten Robinson, Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. Welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

It's indeed an honour having all of you here. It's my first time to welcome a colleague Speaker. Mr. House, thank you, sir.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of

constituents who have travelled to Edmonton today from Elmworth, Alberta. I had the chance to visit with this group of bright students earlier today, and I'm glad that they're able to be here in the Legislature. This school is probably one of the schools closest to the Alberta-B.C. border in the province, so they've come a long ways today. The Grade 9 students from Elmworth school along with their teacher and helper, Mr. Christian Gee and Mr. Brian Grant, are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, followed by the Minister of Education.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 33 visitors representing the School of Hope. They come to us from all over Alberta. Indeed, the School of Hope provides a very unique and interesting educational model in that these are all home-school families and home-school students. They come from all over the province, but the School of Hope's headquarters is in Vermilion, in my constituency. I'm also very proud that they're here because my own two sons are graduates of the School of Hope. They are seated, I believe, in the members' gallery, and I would invite them to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of the best grade 6 teachers in the province of Alberta, Colleen Tremblay, and her grade 6 class from Guthrie school, which is located at Edmonton Garrison in my constituency, just on the north edge of the city here. I have spent a great deal of time at Guthrie with the Gators since being elected as MLA. I'd have to say that my favourite occasion was last month, on March 12, when we recognized and honoured the Canadian troops as our country's 12-year commitment to Afghanistan came to an end. Most of these students have parents who have served in Afghanistan – their strength and determination are truly inspiring – including one of the parents here today, Chris, who is in the air force, and his wife, Lorraine. I'd ask these students and staff to please rise along with the parent helpers so that they can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of grade 6 students from the Kisipatnahk school in Maskwacis. The school is a Cree cultural school offering instruction in Maskwacis Cree language. They're here for a few days enjoying the School at the Legislature program. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Bridget Milligan and Mr. Jordan Roasting, and parent helper Elmira Moonias. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure that today I get to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my recently-announced fiancée, Rachael Bradford. Rachael has become a very special and important person in my life. She centres me and keeps me focused. She is there when I need someone to talk to and when I need someone to listen. More importantly, she is the person that I want to travel the road of life

with. If you can't tell, this is the woman that I have fallen head over heels for. Rachael, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us proceed with other guests, starting with Leduc-Beaumont, followed by the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly the members of the education advisory committee. This provincial committee offers pedagogical expertise to the visitors' services office in their development of educational programming and represents elementary, junior and senior high, and postsecondary education across Alberta. With us today are Sandy Myshak from Edmonton public schools, Anne Marie Brose from Grant MacEwan University, Dr. Craig Harding from Calgary public schools, Corvin Uhrbach from Wolf Creek public schools in Ponoka, Constance Scarlett from the Alberta Museums Association, and Wally Diefenthaler, educational consultant.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize Dr. Carla Peck from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education and Brian St. Germain of the aboriginal family and school program in Red Deer, who could not be with us today.

My guests are seated in the public gallery – they've already risen – and I would ask that they receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very young constituent of mine who this morning walked into my office by himself and said that he wanted to meet his MLA and shared his points of view on a number of very topical and current issues. He tells me that he also engages his teacher and very often wins debates with the teacher. This is Jacob Manz, and Jacob is a student at the Lago Lindo elementary school. You will be seeing him over here one day, I imagine. He is accompanied by his grandmother Ms Penny Miller. Welcome to both of you.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of very special friends of mine. They represent various organizations, but most importantly they are here to support the member's statement I'm going to make about the second oil and gas symposium. As I mention my guests, I'd ask them to rise: Joanne Gui, president of the Chinese Professionals and Entrepreneurs Association of Calgary and also the chair of the second symposium; Nancy Bi, a member of the same organization; Mark Gerlitz, consultant and vice-chair of the committee; Mason Wei, general secretary of the Canada China Chamber of Commerce, which is cohosting the symposium; Edward Liu, principal of ECSSSEN school; Ray Pan, a third-year student at the U of A who also worked a summer internship for me last year. I would like to personally thank each one of them for their dedication and hard work, and I'd ask the House to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Wellness, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka if you have a third.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend Alberta celebrated the third annual Get Outdoors Weekend, or GO, which occurs every second weekend in April. It was an incredible success in great part due to our new GO ambassadors. I'm honoured to introduce four dedicated, humble, extraordinary gentlemen from the Edmonton Eskimos. I would ask that they rise as I call their names. Calvin McCarty is the longest serving active member of the club, kicking off his eighth season with the team as running back par excellence. He's very articulate. He's been named the Eskimos' top Canadian on two occasions and is the 2013 nominee for the Tom Pate award. That, of course, is for the CFL's most outstanding volunteer.

Jonathan Crompton. I was going to say number two, but he's definitely not number two, is he, Jonathan? He was an all-American in high school. He played at the University of Tennessee before being drafted into the NFL by the San Diego super-Chargers. Jonathan is an extremely outgoing young man. Check him out.

Ryan King was born and raised here in Edmonton. He played high school football in Sherwood Park at Bev Facey and is now a linebacker for the Eskimos. But, folks, with the way he throws and runs, I think he might be able to compete for the positions of the two other players as a matter of fact.

Joining the players today is the incomparable Nick Pelletier, community relations co-ordinator for the club, who helped arrange Thursday's game at Austin O'Brien high school.

I'd also like to thank Jon Cornish of the Calgary Stampeders – you may know that he's the CFL's reigning most outstanding Canadian, most outstanding player – who was instrumental in our GO activities in Calgary on Friday with both the seniors at Bethany and the students at Bishop Carroll.

Mr. Speaker, you know, this is a little bit difficult for me as a Stamps fan, but I now have four members of the green and gold to cheer for. They are seated behind me, and they have my back at least for today. I ask my colleagues to join me in saluting Calvin, Jonathan, Ryan, and Nick for their leadership in promoting active lifestyles and for their dedication to our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, two minutes each for members' statements. We should be able to get three in. Let's start with Calgary-Hawkwood and then go to Drumheller-Stettler.

Sino-Canadian Oil and Gas Symposium

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise again for my member's statement. I would like to inform the hon. members of this House that the second annual Sino-Canadian Oil and Gas Symposium is scheduled for Saturday, June 21, at the Red and White Club in Calgary.

Last year, working along with many organizations, including the Chinese Professionals and Entrepreneurs Association of Calgary, the Calgary Chinese Petroleum Club, and the Canada China Chamber of Commerce, we have piloted the very first symposium, and that symposium was a success. It drew over 500 attendees with keynote speeches from the Minister of Energy, the consul general of the People's Republic of China, industry leaders,

and many, many of my colleagues in this House. As reported by Global News, this was a first-of-its-kind conference that brought together industry professionals, Chinese and Canadian investors, and many Alberta MLAs.

This year's symposium will focus on energy globalization and collaboration, which is particularly relevant to Alberta. Energy globalization is not a recent development. However, the surge of growing markets in emerging countries has definitely elevated this higher. Historically Canada was able to primarily focus on the U.S. market. Today that's no longer the reality. I believe the Sino-Canadian Oil and Gas Symposium provides an excellent forum to increase collaboration with emerging markets for our Canadian diversification.

Please join me and other representatives on June 21 at the Red and White Club in Calgary for the second annual Canadian oil and gas symposium.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Government Culture

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we resume this session, we do so with an air of uncertainty and instability on the government side of the House. The uncertainty and instability are due to the resignation of the Member for Calgary-Elbow as Premier. So what's next? Will this queue up the opportunists? Opportunists are those who choose to take advantage of any situation to achieve an end, usually with no regard for principles or consequences.

If regard had been given to these principles and consequences, those within the government caucus would have spoken up prior to the Premier's resignation. Those that will be seeking the Premier's position from within this government have some explaining to do. What transpired under their previous leader, whom they all willingly stood in this House and supported? This most certainly has been a group effort. The entire government caucus is party to the actions of their former leader, since silence, they say, is the voice of complicity. Disregard for principles and consequences stems from the short-sighted ambitions of those who seek only power.

It is my hope that the present culture of entitlement that thrives within this PC government is not carried on by the next Premier. The key ingredient to any government plagued by entitlement is cronyism, and cronyism is the first step towards corruption. The two elements work hand in hand and facilitate each other. Alberta has suffered from the effects of out-of-control cronyism, with special favours being the rule rather than the exception.

As we make our way through another session in this Legislature, let's not forget why we're here. It is the responsibility of every member of this House to act in the best interests of their constituents, and special favours are never in those best interests. In the end, when it comes to cronyism, if you aren't a part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

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

Mental Health Services

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mental illness has long been an unspoken taboo in our society. Mental health problems have often been swept under the rug. These weren't problems that

we were supposed to talk about or admit to even though we all know that ignoring a problem doesn't make it go away. The fact is that 1 in 5 Albertans will experience mental illness in their lifetime, and the other four will have a friend, relative, or colleague who will be affected. I am someone who wants to speak about the devastating effects of mental illness. Recently mental illness affected my own family, when we lost a beloved nephew to suicide.

Many people need help, and I am proud to say that the Alberta government is committed to providing this help through early intervention services, counselling, and treatment beds for those with the most serious needs. The Premier and the Minister of Health announced last week that Budget 2014 has provided \$28 million in new funding, bringing Alberta Health's mental health budget to \$48 million. This is in addition to the \$600 million that Alberta Health Services spends on mental health. We recognize that we need to give mental health support to our children and our youth, so I am pleased to note that permanent funding for mental health programs is now being provided in more than 153 schools in 55 Alberta communities.

Budget 2014 renews and strengthens the Alberta government's commitment to programs and services for mental health promotion, illness prevention, early intervention, and treatment for people whose lives have been touched by mental illness or addiction. What this means is that kids and families across Alberta will continue to have access to a wide range of services and supports. I am proud to speak about this advocacy and continued investment in the mental health and wellness of our children, families, and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're reminded that you have 35 seconds for the question and 35 seconds maximum for the answer.

Let's start the clock, and let's go with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as government flight manifests show, this government's practice of flying high on the taxpayer's dime is even more egregious than we were first led to believe. Apparently, the Premier, her daughter, and a staff entourage flew multiple times on the government planes, including a trip to Jasper on a government plane for a weekend vacation during the June floods. The purpose of the trip was listed as meetings with government officials. Could the Premier tell us which officials the previous Premier met with on this trip, and what, if any, government business was done?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think it's extremely inappropriate for the hon. member to characterize the trip as a vacation. She does not know that. That is not an appropriate assumption. The assumption has to be that people using government planes are using them for government business and for appropriate government business. Unless she has any evidence to the contrary, I would suggest she not describe a trip in that way.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's why I asked the question, so the Premier could clarify what government business was done. He declined to.

This government has assured us that there are rigorous guidelines in place to prevent these abuses of taxpayer dollars

from happening. However, guidelines are only as good as the people who enforce them: in this case, the Minister of Finance and his government aircraft co-ordinator, who works right out of his office. To the Minister of Finance: if clear guidelines existed to prevent these abuses from happening, why did he choose not to enforce them?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier so aptly put it, there is no evidence that this was not for government business. I don't personally recall the actual details around the trip, but I can tell you that the Auditor General is going to review how government aircraft are handled in this province. He's going to look at the efficiency of those aircraft. We look forward to that report.

Ministers and the Premier are responsible for who goes on the plane, Mr. Speaker. We've had municipal officials, we've had MLAs, we've had guests of the ministers on those planes. The empty seat costs no more to the taxpayer.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, if there was government business, the obligation is on them to release it. I'm calling on them to release what government business happened in Jasper that weekend because it's now clear that this government just can't be trusted to responsibly own and operate a fleet of aircraft.

The government of British Columbia, with all of its remote locations, makes do without the luxury of a government fleet and uses commercial flights for the vast majority of their air travel, about 95 per cent. Alberta's fleet of government planes is clearly unnecessary and frequently abused. To the Premier: will he agree to sell the government fleet?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the comparator to B.C. is probably not as accurate as the hon. member would like it to be. The B.C. government does charter helicopters and other planes to get their members elsewhere in the province, at considerable expense. Saskatchewan actually owns a jet; so does Manitoba. Other provinces use their planes. The difference is that we are transparent about the manifests and when we use the planes. It's very difficult to do that in other jurisdictions. This is the gold standard.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: That's how we're able to see that it's frequently abused and not used responsibly.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister's department owns the fleet and makes the rules for their use. The person who books and controls the planes works out of the Finance minister's office, in room 423 of this building. The Finance minister had to know about the abuse, the deadheading, the duplicate flights, the use of the planes for vacations, and the travel back and forth to PC Party fundraisers. For the Finance minister to not know was either wilful negligence or incompetence. Minister, which is it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it is neither. The planes are used to get cabinet ministers, the Premier, and the Lieutenant Governor to various locations around this province because we want to talk to Albertans. We want to be in their communities, and they want us to be there as well. To characterize simply the fact that they know where we went as being abuse of the planes, frankly, is irresponsible, and the hon. member should know that.

Ms Smith: And also, apparently, children, nannies, and friends on the government planes.

Mr. Speaker, the antibullying minister missed an opportunity a few weeks ago to apologize to Albertans for her crass remarks about electricians. You should listen up, Minister, because this is also a teachable moment. Records show that she had her daughter fly on the government planes in violation of government policies. Will the antibullying minister apologize to Albertans for wasting taxpayer dollars, and will she pay the money back?

Ms Jansen: I thank you for the question. As I understand it, the flight policy implemented in 2010 indicates that passengers approved for government flights are at the discretion of the minister responsible. It didn't cost a dime extra for my daughter to travel on that flight. If it did, I would happily pay the money back.

Ms Smith: It's not what the policy was that the Auditor General described. He said that only spouses would be able to travel on government planes and only if they were attending events. It's interesting that the change of policy occurred, and no one knew about it.

It's quite clear that this government can't be trusted. They grasp at every entitlement and perk, they never care about the taxpayer, and they never consider that the money could be better spent helping vulnerable Albertans. It costs \$7 million a year to maintain the government fleet. Other provinces have sold their fleets, and this government should follow suit. To the Premier: will he agree to sell the unnecessary and frequently . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the negativity of the questioning in the House today is indicative of what's been going on on that side for a while. The truth of the matter is that the Auditor General did review the policies in previous years and actually said that there was value in us having those planes to get to various places around our province. He did make a recommendation that it should be for spouses. If the hon. opposition had done their homework, they would realize that after that the government did come out with a policy where we said that the ministers will be responsible for the guests on the plane because it might not be the spouse. It might be the mayor of High River. It might be some MLA from the opposition.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third and final set of main questions, opposition leader.

Ms Smith: So they ignored the Auditor General's recommendation. Nice work.

Government Advertising

Ms Smith: All over Alberta you can't turn on a radio without hearing advertisements promoting this government's budget, which, by the way, hasn't passed yet, Mr. Speaker. You might want to look into that. Albertans are inundated with misleading and dubious statements about this government's building Alberta plan. I think my two previous questions clearly show that billing Alberta is the more appropriate phrase. To the Finance minister: just how much money is being wasted on advertising a budget that hasn't even passed yet?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only dubious and misleading comments that have been coming out are from the opposition around what this budget is all about. This budget is about building Alberta. It's about putting schools, roads, and hospitals where

Albertans need them. It's about an economy that is double – double – the Canadian average in terms of its growth. It's about a place where three times the national average of the population is moving to this province. Why? Because it is a responsible government that is building the infrastructure those new Albertans want and need, because we're creating the jobs that Albertans are looking for. Those are the priorities of Albertans, not the questions that were dubious.

Ms Smith: This PC government seems to think that wasting taxpayer money is their right and their entitlement, and Albertans are tired of it. We already know about the \$3 million that has been spent on Building Alberta signs all over the province, and we just learned that the government decided to waste 10,000 taxpayer dollars to buy Building Alberta promotional jackets for the Premier, government ministers, their staff, and others. Does the Premier think that hard-working taxpayers should be buying him and his well-paid colleagues jackets to promote the government's propaganda?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I didn't get a jacket. I'll have to look into that. Any time that people look into promotional items for a tour such as that, jackets and clothing are part of that process. In this particular case I don't know that I would agree that that money was well spent. In fact, if it was to be brought up to me, I probably wouldn't approve that as an expense now. [interjections] It's always easy to look at things in hindsight and say: is that the most appropriate way to spend money? It's much harder to do it at the time.

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm struggling a bit to hear the questions and the answers, so if you'd please keep it down, I'd appreciate it.

Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, any Albertan can log on to the web page of almost any government MLA and see them proudly wearing their taxpayer-paid-for Building Alberta promotional jackets. They'll also find an interesting assortment of defeated PC MLAs wearing them as well like Ray Danyluk and Luke Ouellette. The PC Party should pay this money back. Or does the Premier honestly think it's appropriate to use taxpayer money to buy jackets for failed PC candidates? Really? Really?

Mr. Hancock: If that was what was being done, it would be wrong, but that's not what was done. In fact, there are proud mayors and reeves around the province also wearing the jackets, as I understand it, proud participants of the tour wearing those jackets, as I understand it. There are some 200 of them. There are not that many failed PC candidates in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the leader of the ND opposition. [interjections] The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition. Second call.

Health Facilities Infrastructure

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The deferred maintenance tab for Alberta's health facilities is close to \$1 billion, yet the province is committing only \$70 million to address this. The Misericordia hospital board wrote to the Minister of Health asking for \$33 million to address critical maintenance issues. They got only \$19 million. Our hospitals have suffered 20 years of neglect, during which the Premier was in cabinet, and he even served as

Health minister. To the Premier: how did you allow this happen, and why are continuing to allow this to happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. You know, we work with Alberta Health Services on maintenance. We work with school boards. On government buildings we do that ourselves. It's always a value judgment because you can only spend each dollar once. The hon. member might want to write that piece down. When we spend each dollar once, we have to decide whether it's for something new or to fix something that's already there. It's always a tough decision. We make plans every year. We increase our budgets for maintenance every year. I would remind him also that 95 per cent of the schools, hospitals, and postsecondaries are in good or fair condition. We intend to keep them that way.

Dr. Sherman: It's quite clear that their value judgment is that where our children are sick and elderly are kept, they want to let those buildings get rundown.

The Minister of Health is stuck in bureaucratic planning cycles instead of planning construction cycles, which is what the Misericordia hospital needs, to get building. The Misericordia needs replacing, not \$19 million worth of temporary repairs, barely enough to fix the plumbing, keep the lights on, and stop the roof from leaking let alone look after sick patients. To the Premier: are there plans to replace the Misericordia, and if so, where is it on the priority list?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we work, again, with Alberta Health Services. They worked with the Health ministry and with our ministry to deliver those new maintenance programs. Again, it's a matter of balance. It always has been and always will be. When the agencies identify something that needs to be fixed, it goes in the budget. The fact is that not unlike an Alberta family, you don't put in a new furnace every year; you plan on putting it in when the furnace fails. If you can squeeze 25 years out of it, you try to, and when it fails, you fix it. On the other hand, there are planned things that you do on a schedule. It's a combination.

Dr. Sherman: It's quite clear that there's no plan and there's no priority list. That's what I heard.

Like the rest of the province, west Edmonton is growing rapidly, and the Misericordia hospital staff and administrators continue to do a great job despite severe underfunding for front-line care and hospital maintenance and renovations. The Health minister said that this government is well into the planning process for a new hospital in the Capital health region. To the Premier. What the folks in the west end want to know is: will you build a new Misericordia hospital? If so, when, and if not, why not?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member had been listening, he would have heard the Minister of Health respond to that question a number of times over the last couple of weeks. The hon. member raised in his first question that I've been here 17 years while it deteriorates. Well, it seems to me that he's been here for six years, and this is the first time he's raised the issue in the Legislature, so I'm wondering where his priorities have been.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Political Party Leadership Campaign Financing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, here we go again. Another day, another Tory leadership race. Under this government's legislation there is no maximum limit on how much an individual or a corporation can donate to a leadership candidate. To the Premier: will he amend the law to impose the same limits on leadership donations as presently exist for election campaigns, and if not, why not?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you've said a number of times, internal party matters are matters for the parties. I do believe, though, that this province is one of the few jurisdictions in the country that actually has leadership rules in our Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. I think we're leading the country in openness and transparency with respect to how leadership races are financed.

The Speaker: The administration and enforcement falls within the Chief Electoral Officer's purview; however, amendments, if you wish any, are the purview of this House.

Carry on. First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much. The Premier talks out of both sides of his mouth. He says on the one hand, "Oh, this is an internal party matter," and then he says: "Oh, but guess what? We've legislated." But what you haven't legislated, Mr. Premier, are any limits on how much someone can donate. What's to stop someone like Daryl Katz making a \$400,000 donation to some candidate that's going to support his hundred million dollar demand for his hockey palace? How are you going to stop that, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the fact that all donations have to be published above a certain amount, a fact that we've included in the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, I think, makes it clear to any candidate that's in a leadership race in any party that they had better be circumspect about how they do their finances because if they're not, it will affect their ability to have longevity in office.

The Speaker: Again, hon. member, the actual administration of the act and the enforcement of it, which is where I think you're going, are not the purview of the government. They're the purview of the Chief Electoral Officer. Amendments, if any, if that's how you wish to recraft your question, will be up to you.

Mr. Mason: I'm asking for amendments to legislation.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the PCs are the party of big money. It sure looks like the Premier wants to keep it that way. Big money buys big influence. My question is to the Premier. Why are you unwilling to legislate an end to the corrosive effect of big money on politics in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a challenge or an assumption that's really not warranted. There is absolutely no evidence that big money has anything to do with good governance in this province. In fact, this government over the years has enjoyed the support of Albertans from right across the spectrum and from right across the province. That, indeed, has been the success of this government over the years, that we truly represent all corners of the province and all people in the province. That's how you get success. It has nothing to do with how much money you have.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

No more preambles now. The first five main sets of questions have gone. Let's move on to Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Airdrie.

Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow I'll be taking part in a round-table for missing and murdered aboriginal women in Fort McMurray. The discussion has been put together in response to the decision by the federal government to not research the disproportionately high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Aboriginal women are much more likely to be murdered by strangers, and the murderers of aboriginal women are much less likely to be convicted. The round-table in Fort McMurray will also include friends and family members of these women. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: are there currently any statistics for aboriginal women that may have been murdered or have gone missing in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Anyone wish to respond? The Minister of Aboriginal Relations, second call.

Mr. Oberle: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I missed the question entirely. I understand the member is interested in the conference that's taking place on missing and murdered aboriginal women. He'll know that our government has advocated with the federal government for an inquiry into the situation of missing and murdered aboriginal women in our country.

Mr. Allen: Well, I'm not sure if these are a moot point. To the same minister: does the provincial government have a position as far as the necessity to investigate? I will assume that's your answer, Minister.

Mr. Oberle: We do, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, we have already advocated with the federal government. We've joined fellow ministers and premiers across the country in doing so. The importance of moving forward and answering some of these questions was also discussed as part of the Truth and Reconciliation commission.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll forego my second supplemental.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has called the Wildrose everything from ignorant to deceptive in our criticism of his new budget accounting methods, which ignore capital spending when calculating the size of the provincial deficit. The problem is that Alberta's most respected former Finance minister, Jim Dinning, agrees with us, stating that Alberta must "return to the simple and clear accounting rules used to get our government back in the black," meaning that "we should be able to understand the government's books." Minister, is Jim Dinning also ignorant and deceptive in his critique of your budgeting methods?

2:10

Mr. Horner: No, Mr. Speaker. Only the Wildrose Alliance is doing that. Mr. Dinning was one of the 75 CEOs and executives that we actually interviewed back in 2012, I believe it was, when we talked about the idea of following the municipal governance that is within our province and across the country of separating operating from capital. In the notes – and I actually went back and referred to those notes of the meeting – Mr. Dinning agreed that that would be a good thing to do as did Mr. Lougheed at the time. As well, Mr. Speaker, I asked Mr. Dinning: did he think it was wise, if it made financial sense, to use the capital markets to amortize long-term assets over their useful life? He said yes.

Mr. Anderson: So I guess Mr. Dinning is now a liar, too. That's interesting.

Mr. Dinning went further. He decried this PC government's decision to borrow \$21 billion by 2016, stating, "Albertans sacrificed a lot to have a debt-free future. We don't want that hard work put at risk." Minister, now that the former Premier is gone, will you commit to follow Mr. Dinning's sage advice, put a halt to debt financing, and do what any competent Finance minister would be able to do with \$44 billion at his disposal, and that's build what Albertans need without plunging us and our kids back into debt?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the hon. members are not telling Albertans what they would defer. As to the Leader of the Opposition's comment about how they would balance the budget, they would defer the capital spending. So I would ask them: which school are they not going to build, which road are they not going to build, which hospital are they not going to build? How much damage to the economy are they going to do before they realize that it was the wrong thing to do? The chair of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce agrees with what we're doing. The University of Toronto's public policy agrees with what we're doing. Standard & Poor's agrees with it. I could go on and on.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister is doing a great job of auditioning for opposition. Well done.

Minister, given that virtually every former PC Finance minister – every one – from Mr. Dinning to Dr. Morton to Mr. Snelgrove to Dr. Oberg, all of them, have said that your new accounting methods are confusing, they are misguided, and that your decision to plunge our province deep into debt is equally wrong, Minister, will you please stop with the "everyone's lost but me" attitude, stop going into debt, and publish a budget that you don't need the Rosetta stone to understand?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that when I go around the province and I have town halls and public meetings and I describe what our income statement is and what our balance sheet is, Albertans understand, including the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, which believes that this budget is a balanced budget with a reasonable revenue forecast, reduction of growth in operating expenses, the redirection of some revenues into savings, and the use of strategic debt to invest in infrastructure. Standard & Poor's: "The province's financial management is very positive, in our view. Budget information is comprehensive and detailed." These are the people that are taking information from our documents and giving us our credit rating. I think they know what they're talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Edmonton's Elevate Report

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2012 Elevate report prepared by the city of Edmonton comments that the city and its citizens must work together to create strong and sustainable neighbourhoods and communities. The report defines mature neighbourhoods, and from Avonmore to Gold Bar all communities, all neighbourhoods in my constituency are mature. This report highlights the findings of the Community Sustainability Task Force and offers recommendations in order to mitigate the issues challenging these types of communities. To the Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs: is your department aware of this report and its findings?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to tell the member that, yes, I have seen the Elevate report, and it's extremely well done. The city of Edmonton brought stakeholders from across the community together to look at community sustainability, especially in older neighbourhoods that are well developed. But I can promise this, Member, that we will continue to work with the city of Edmonton and all our municipalities to ensure that they have the ability to meet local needs and create the infrastructure that they need into the future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you. To the same minister: can you give me some feeling that the findings of the Elevate report will influence decisions that you're making in the future?

Mr. Weadick: Well, that's a really good question. Mr. Speaker, upon reading the report, I noticed that many of the issues that came up would be consistent with many municipalities across the province, whether they be large municipalities or small municipalities, and I believe that this report could create some of the issues that the city of Edmonton may want to bring forward as we talk about the MGA review, looking at what things may need to be changed to ensure we have sustainable municipalities into the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, one of the groups that's mentioned in the report is the school boards and schools. To the Minister of Education: do we take mature neighbourhood status into account when considering innovative ways to provide capital and fund the education of our youth in these mature areas?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the member for being such a strong advocate for his community. I know he's been very involved in the open houses and the dialogues that Edmonton Catholic has had with respect to some of his schools in mature neighbourhoods. The shorter answer is that, yes, we do. But, really, we rely on the school boards – I mean, they're the locally, duly elected folks – to make those decisions. They put their capital plans together, and we decide which projects across the province to fund. But it's up to the school boards to decide, you know, what kinds of partnerships and the innovative solutions that the local community may have with respect to any particular project.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of Alberta parents and their children stood in the cold this weekend rallying for changes to the math curriculum, and I proudly stood with them. A petition calling on the Minister of Education to reinstate the basics back into the curriculum has now reached 13,000. Parents want Alberta Education to provide teachers with a textbook or a math program that emphasizes the tried-and-true, tested methods of mathematics. They want their kids to focus on and to master standard algorithms, vertical addition and subtraction. Will the minister commit to making that the primary focus, and if so, how?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to emphasize once again that the basics were never gone. I think that if you're looking for evidence that there's a problem with numeracy in Alberta, you can just look across the aisle. To say that there were hundreds of people at that rally this weekend is a bit of a stretch, just like to say that our math scores have dropped 32 per cent, which is what the member said not too long ago, is a bit of a stretch because, actually, they dropped two and a half per cent over the last three years. The reality is that they don't want us to teach problem solving. They don't want us to teach 21st century skills. They just want us to teach basics. We think that we need to learn both.

Mr. McAllister: Those are the minister's words, and they are inaccurate, Mr. Speaker.

Given that yesterday the Deputy Minister of Education defended the new math philosophy, stating, "With all due respect, mathematicians and math profs [are] not the best advisors on math pedagogy" – now, I know there are some consultants here today, and that's good. You should be well rounded. But it is troubling. Minister, don't you find it troubling that you don't go to math experts for advice on mathematics?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we absolutely do go to math experts for advice, and we do go to experts on pedagogy. We go beyond that. We go right across the world to see what leading jurisdictions are doing, those that are performing better than us on international tests and are advancing their scores. We go to businesses and the business leaders across the country, and they're telling us that the basics are important but so is problem solving, so are the 21st century skills and the soft skills. These folks don't agree with that. They want us just to revert back in time to the basics. We think that we need to progress and do a better job of teaching both.

Mr. McAllister: You should teach both, and you should focus on the basics for our children.

Now, given that Manitoba just went through this very same thing, Mr. Speaker, and given that their government did the right thing, reinstated a focus on the fundamentals as their primary teaching strategy – they listened and did the right thing for our kids. Minister, stop the polarizing of this issue. Will you do the right thing for our kids and focus on the fundamentals?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, who's polarizing here? They asked us some time ago to promise to make the basics emphasized in the new curriculum. I said that, yes, we would. It's in *Hansard*, March 4. I said: yes, we would. We've said yes, yes, yes so many times that they can't take yes for an answer. We agree that the basics are important. It's already in the curriculum. We've also agreed with some of the parents and groups that are concerned. We're going to re-emphasize that in September, and we're going to make it an emphasis of the new curriculum that we're working on. But we

also agree with world-leading experts. We believe and we agree with business leaders that the soft skills and problem solving are also important.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:20 School Codes of Conduct

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. Last week I asked about the Heritage Christian Academy. Today it's about the Prairie Christian Academy, a fully funded public school which makes staff sign a professional ethical standards document that requires them to – get this, Mr. Speaker – uphold the sanctity of marriage, defined as that between a man and a woman, and abstain from homosexual relations. To the minister: 15 years after the Supreme Court of Canada stated that this practice is against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Humans Rights Act, why is this still happening?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we were also extremely concerned when the reports came out this weekend. Obviously, I want to be clear that we don't tolerate any discrimination or any bullying in any of our schools for any reason, and that goes for staff or students. We want to make sure that all the operations in our schools fully comply with provincial legislation. That means the Education Act and the Human Rights Act, and we're taking steps to make sure that that's the case.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, over the course of my time as critic I've repeatedly brought examples of these violations of the Charter and the Human Rights Act. Given the frequency, Mr. Minister, does your ministry approve of these policies, or do you just turn a blind eye to the practice of what is actually happening here in Alberta? It happens all the time.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this member doesn't believe in choice, he doesn't believe in giving parents choice with respect to different schools, and he doesn't believe in us funding that education. So he would like to wipe and smear every private school, every charter school, every alternative program with the same brush because we've got an issue in a few. Let's deal with the issue in the few, and we're going to do that. We've told the department that we want them to review all the master agreements between alternative programs and school boards and all the employment agreements to make sure that they're complying with provincial legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you had two points of order, one at 2:21 and one at 2:21 and a half or so. We'll deal with them shortly. Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: What I do believe is that all schools in this province should be subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act and that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. It appears that this minister really doesn't care that much about it. Given this information that has come out today and this weekend, can you not now see the need for us to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered kids in schools across this province where this type of attitude exists and make their lives better with this legislation to be made mandatory? Will you not do things to make . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I agree. Yes, I agree with the member, and we're doing things every day to make kids' lives better. We want to make sure that not only that segment of the population is protected but every segment of the population, not just our students but also our staff. We have those provincial legislations. They should be enforced. We're taking steps to make sure the ministry is going to look at this very closely. We've also got a regulatory review committee that doesn't have its final report back. They're going to be tasked to have a close look at this to make sure that if there are any regulations that we need to put in place, they give us assurances that these provincial legislations are being enforced. Then we'll do that, too.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this Education minister capitulated to right-wing, special-interest groups and the Wildrose and removed the protections of the Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms from the Education Act. The minister just said that he doesn't tolerate discrimination of any kind in schools. To the Minister of Education: then why did you remove it?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let's be really clear about what section 11 of the Human Rights Act is about. It's about parental rights. There was a time in the history of this country and in the history of this province when parental rights with respect to education were not respected, and we spent a day last week lamenting that dark period in Alberta's history. The government knows better than the parent with respect to making choices for the education of their children: we don't believe that. Obviously, we've got some strict standards. We've got some great legislation to protect human rights. Those things are in place, and they supersede the Education Act and other things that are out there. But parental rights and parental choice are important, too.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, human rights are being trampled.

Given that we have at least two examples of schools blatantly violating human rights that are enshrined in the Canadian Charter and given that schools are openly discriminating against vulnerable youth and teachers by requiring them to sign unconstitutional codes of conduct, to the same minister: why are you allowing publicly funded schools and school boards to violate the Charter rights of their students and staff and discriminate against them?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we're not allowing anything. We do devolve a lot of authority to school boards. They're duly elected trustees of the system, and they manage the operations. They manage those employment agreements and so forth, and they should. If circumstances come to light like we've recently been made aware of, we're going to look into those, and we're going to address those. There's provincial legislation and national legislation to protect people, and we're going to make sure that's enforced.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that because this PC government succumbed to pressure from the Wildrose and special-interest groups, students can be expelled for exercising their constitutionally protected rights and given that as Minister of Education it's your responsibility to ensure that all students can go to school free from bullying and discrimination, will you stop making offensive excuses and commit to ensuring that constitutional human rights are protected in publicly funded schools, and if not, why not?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think it's only the NDP that view parents as a special-interest group. I think that what I've just said here over the last several questions is affirmation that we are

committed to the Human Rights Act in Alberta. It is affirmation that we are committed, if you look at the Education Act in Alberta and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We're going to work with our school boards and everyone who's funded by this province to deliver education to make sure that those pieces of legislation are being adhered to.

AISH Wait Times

Mrs. Towle: My questions today will be on behalf of vulnerable Albertans. Last week at budget estimates for Human Services we learned that the wait time for an AISH application sits at three to four months. This is apparently due to over 50 applications being received each and every day. According to the minister approximately 50 per cent of AISH applications, or about 9,000 cases per year, are denied, and of those that are denied, there is an additional five-month wait time to hear the appeal. Minister, how is it even remotely acceptable for any Albertan applying for AISH to wait for nine months to a year for their application to be processed and/or appealed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a valid point. The fact is that since 2012, when AISH rates were increased, the sheer volume of applications has gone up very, very significantly, with some estimates of an over 80 per cent increase in applications. What we have to do is make sure that while we reduce processing times, which we have done – we've made some progress on that, down to 15 weeks. We have more work to do. In addition, we've appointed new members to appeal panels that will attempt to clear up the backlog in that area.

Mrs. Towle: Given that the increase in AISH applications is not a surprise and the minister is able to foresee an additional increase in the workload to handle these appeals, can the minister tell Albertans exactly how many additional new members, not replacement members, have been appointed to the citizens' review panel to deal with these AISH application wait times?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I believe the number is 53 new members; 53 new members from across the province have been added to the AISH appeal panels. In addition to that, additional sitting days have been instituted so that we can try to clean up the backlog as quickly as possible to make sure people can get results as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Towle: Given that there is a 5 per cent budget increase to the Ministry of Human Services yet the only increase in staff is two full-time equivalents, which are only in the minister's own office, can the minister explain how hiring political staff in his own office is more important than hiring front-line staff who are trying to help vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we spoke about that issue at length. It's not entirely accurate, but we'll let bygones be bygones for today. It's Monday. The fact is that we have a series of new applications. It's very important that we support vulnerable Albertans. That's why this government, on this side of the House, increased AISH by \$400, to make sure that it is the most supportive program in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Little Bow.

Promotion of Alberta Energy Industry

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship tabled its final report on the review of the monetization of natural gas in Alberta. As an advocate for Alberta's Industrial Heartland, currently Canada's largest petrochemical processing region, there is a recommendation of great interest to the area. Knowing that the heartland's economic growth means economic growth for Alberta, to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education: what is being done to make Alberta an even more attractive place for value-added companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister and Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question for all Albertans because we have a policy that, for example, calls for 66 per cent of our bitumen to be upgraded here at home and 50 per cent of that going upstream. We also have an ethane policy. What we need to do is make sure that the foundations are there for business to be able to engage right here. Innovation and Advanced Education works with Energy, works with other departments in government to develop those policy frameworks, and works with industry to make sure that those policy frameworks will be workable for them so that they can do their business here.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the Minister of Energy: given that time is of the essence when these companies are deciding where to set up shop, what can we expect with respect to a policy decision on the report, and how long will it take to implement those recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time is of the essence. A lot of times when businesses are looking at the opportunities that they might have, their time frame is finite, so they want to work closely with our departments to understand what policy frameworks are in place, and we need to work with them to make sure that our policy development results in policies that actually work for industry and for Albertans. We try to do that on a timely basis. We're working with Energy and with other departments to make sure that that can happen, and it is happening for Albertans.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. My final question is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. Given the industrial traffic that commutes through Fort Saskatchewan, my constituency is looking for a heavy-load bridge. Can we expect one in the near future?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, currently there are three heavy-haul bridges across the North Saskatchewan River – Vinca, Waskatenau, and Duvernay – that support development in northeast Alberta. It is expected that the completion of the northeast leg of the Anthony Henday, to be completed in 2016, also will provide two new bridges with seven lanes across the North Saskatchewan River. This will help the congestion on highway 15 at the crossing of Fort Saskatchewan. It will also help with the movement of people, goods, and services in and around the northeast part of the capital region.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Cross.

Rural Flood Damage Payments

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 30 I raised a question about Jeff Callahan, a local farmer near High River who had flood damage in the June flood. The former Municipal Affairs minister explained that his crop loss should be covered through the emergency management incurred costs, which at that time we were all happy with. It looked like we had the problem solved. But then we found out that nobody was taking responsibility for who pumped the water on those said lands. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Someone paid for those pumps to run on this farmer's land. Why won't they pay for the damage they caused?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank this member for this question. I think it really highlights one of the issues that we haven't talked a lot about, and that is some of the damage done during the flood in rural Alberta. You know, we lost something like 30 municipal water-pumping systems, and we did have farmland damage. It was a major event. The DRP does cover input costs like fertilizer and those sorts of things on land that has been damaged by overland flooding.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, part of the problem here is that it wasn't just overland flooding. It was the fact that the local municipality kept pumping water onto this land into August. It damaged the land. It made it muddy. It made it where the combines have been stuck during harvest time. When can this farmer and other farmers around him expect the MD or the government to take responsibility and find a solution to actually pay for the loss and the damages due to the value of it?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would not want to speak on behalf of the county that did the pumping. I'm sure that the member can sit down and work with them as he is a ratepayer of theirs. We always try to help find solutions to these very important cases. Any damage caused by the overland flooding portion is covered by the DRP for the input costs only, not for loss of crop.

Thank you.

Mr. Donovan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it kind of interesting because the MD of Bighorn, I believe, paid \$1.2 million or \$1.7 million for rocks from Lafarge, that Lafarge billed the DRP for, which, it was obviously laid out, was worth more than the rock value at the time. Can the minister tell me how Lafarge can get paid for extra value on their rocks, yet my farmers are expected to just take the loss?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know the value of the rocks that Lafarge was selling or who was using it, but I do know that we're concerned about the farmers in the south and some of the damage that they incurred. We'll continue to work with these landowners. For any of the landowners that do feel that the DRP process didn't work for them, there is an appeal process in place. We would ask them to go ahead with that for any

of the damages caused by overland flooding, and the DRP will treat them fairly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Student Employment Supports

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the last day of classes for postsecondary students, and tomorrow thousands of students will be out looking for summer jobs. It will be difficult to find employment because we know that the unemployment rate for youth is twice that for the general population. I can tell you that students remain very upset that the summer temporary employment program, in place for over 40 years, was cancelled last year. My question is to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: why was the STEP program cancelled when it provided 3,000 jobs a year for students?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the program, that at that time was administered by the Ministry of Human Services, was indeed cancelled. It was a very difficult decision, I imagine, for the ministry and for the entire government as it was made at a time of fiscal restraint. At the same time, I have to tell you that we found that there was a better way of allocating these dollars for students to allow them not only a job during summertime but much more practical and relevant experience. So stay tuned in the future.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: does that mean that you will commit to students, nonprofit organizations, and businesses that the STEP program will be reinstated in time for them to access it this spring?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have given direction to my department to look at the program. One of the weaknesses found in the last program was that students were not finding employment in areas that were actually relevant to their studies, so we're hoping to give a triple benefit: give students jobs, give them relevant experience during the summertime on the job, and allow businesses and not-for-profit agencies to benefit from the wisdom that these students will be bringing from the classroom into those offices and places of employment. We are committed to it, and our departments are working on putting a much better program in place.

Mrs. Fritz: That is good news, Mr. Speaker, because what I hear the minister saying is that you will lift the suspension and reinstate the program that was suspended in 2013. My question is: how and when will you communicate this new program to the students and the nonprofit organizations and businesses?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that we will do better than that. We will not lift the suspension, but we are in the process of designing a much better STEP program, which probably will be known by a different name, a program that will actually meet not only the employment needs of our students, even though at this time we know that employment is ample in this province, but will give them, more importantly, related experience in the area of their study and, by doing so, also benefit the businesses. So stay tuned. Our departments are working on this. It's a crossministerial initiative. We know it's very important to our students and business sector.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Dunvegan-Central-Peace-Notley.

Lung Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 Alberta Health Services announced that it would open new rapid-access clinics in both Calgary and Edmonton to co-ordinate lung cancer assessment, testing, and treatment for people around the province. AHS said that once these clinics were fully functional, they would treat 4,000 patients per year. We were told these clinics would dramatically reduce wait times across the province and that central Albertans would benefit, yet here we are in 2014 and wait times for lung cancer treatment in Alberta are by far the longest in the country. To the Health minister: why have these clinics failed to deliver the results that Albertans were promised?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is nothing more important than making sure that when Albertans have a health issue, they have access to the services they need. That's why this government has made huge commitments right across this province, particularly on cancer care, with the cancer corridor and with moving out treatment right across the province. I know that the Minister of Health has talked a number of times about the plans in place to reduce wait times, and that work is happening as we speak.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that these rapid-access clinics were supposed to result in Albertans accessing lung cancer surgery in 60 days or less from the time of booking yet three years later most Albertans are waiting close to 90 days to access this life-saving procedure, can the associate minister of Health tell us what specifically he is doing now to get these wait times under control?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I can tell him that in the last couple of weeks I have been through the Cross Cancer hospital in Edmonton and through the Tom Baker in Calgary just last Friday. I want the hon. member to know this government takes that seriously. I spent some serious time with the people that are in charge of the cancer care system here in Alberta. They are making the point that we deliver a great quality of service here, that we need to keep investing and that we need to expand the system.

2:40

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the wait times in central Alberta to see a medical oncologist from the date of referral to the first consult is by far the highest in the province at 7.3 weeks and given that the benchmark in the province is four weeks, can the associate minister of Health please explain this failure to my constituents and the constituents in central Alberta?

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, we're always conscious of wait times in this province, especially with something as critical as oncology. AHS will be targeting these areas. We know that we've got some wait times that are slightly longer in some areas of the province than others in this country, but we are working on that. We also have to remember that central Alberta along with many other areas in this province is growing at a very, very rapid rate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The time for question period has expired. In 30 seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements, beginning with Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us proceed, then, with the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Cross.

Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bitamo, welcome, a phrase you will hear quite often at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, which opened in 1974. It's 40 years young this year, and the village will welcome guests beginning May 17 for this season. It's open daily throughout the summer from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Monday, September 1, with the addition of the Harvest of the Past Festival on September 7. The site is located 45 minutes east of Edmonton in Lamont county. The village re-creates with historical authenticity the settlement of Ukrainian immigrants to the area from 1899 to 1930.

The site is hosting some notable festivals this year. On May 19 is the Celebration of Dance, Alberta's largest Ukrainian dance extravaganza. On June 14, a very special festival, the village is proud to collaborate with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra to present Symphony at the Village. This live concert in the meadow will feature a collection of Ukrainian-inspired music and traditional family favourites. It's a significant first for the village. On June 29 a special display of historic vehicles is part of Vintage Day. On August 10 a celebration of Alberta's vibrant Ukrainian community past and present is co-hosted by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. On August 24 Friends of the Ukrainian Village Society present Music Fest 2014. The season wraps up with a harvest of the past, a re-creation of an old-fashioned threshing bee.

Family-friendly activities are found throughout the historic village. Horse-drawn wagon rides, traditional Ukrainian food, and costumed role players will make your visit memorable. It's a Zabava all summer long. Bring the family out to enjoy the party and celebrate this great history.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Agrium Western Event Centre

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise that an exciting new facility for the exhibition, competition, and display of animals is being constructed for Albertans by the Calgary Stampede. It will be the only facility of its kind in Canada. The Agrium Western Event Centre is near completion and is designed to have an essential role in making the Calgary Stampede a year-round gathering place.

This concept is new, and it is critically important. The centre will connect urban and rural communities, and it will host an engaging, globally focused educational program.

This beautiful \$60 million facility includes a show floor with seating for 2,500 people, a 20,000-square-foot multipurpose hall, and an outstanding 8,000-square-foot rotunda.

The Agrium Western Event Centre will be the new home for western equine events at Stampede Park, hosting both regional

and international competitions, exhibitions, and trade shows. Four events have already signed multiyear agreements with the Stampede to host their major shows and competitions there. The centre will also promote how agriculture changes lives around the world, emphasizing the sustainability concept of food supplies. The building's magnificent rotunda will also be the home of journey 2050, which is a unique educational program for junior high school aged children. They will be empowered to make decisions and have fun exploring the challenge of sustainably feeding the world in 2050.

Mr. Speaker, as a director of the Calgary Stampede board I'd ask that you and members of the Assembly join me in acknowledging and thanking the governments of Alberta and Canada for their matching contributions along with Agrium and the private donors and the Calgary Stampede board, staff, and volunteers for creating an outstanding, world-class Agrium Western Event Centre.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition.

Public Service Pensions

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the years since the cowboys on Wall Street crashed the world economy, there have been repeated attacks on public-sector pensions by right-wing elected officials across the world. We've seen this in the U.S., and we've seen this in Alberta. In fact, we've seen this Conservative government pass two bills, Bill 45 and Bill 46, that contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the ability of front-line workers to assemble, and the ability of Albertans to even speak freely about striking, one of the most fundamental rights, freedom of speech, in this country.

The fact of the matter is that public servants built this great country. Our civil service is run by some of the hardest working, best public servants. Our public school system is run by very good public servants and teachers and support staff. Our health system is run by the very heroes who look after the patients: the unit clerks, the cleaning staff, the nurses, the LPNs, respiratory therapists, the paramedics. Public servants stay on call 24 hours a day, while we sleep, to protect us, from our police officers to our firefighters to our paramedics. Mr. Speaker, I think you can agree with me on that. The question is: why would this government attack the rights and freedoms of the very people who built this province and this country?

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about pensions. The public service pensions allow those people, those very heroes who built our province, to live their lives with some dignity, some dignity so they can pay their bills, which are pretty high in this province, so they can buy their grandkids some toys, and look after themselves. The Alberta Liberals stand here in support of public-sector workers.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table this document written by Dr. Charles Boulet, entitled

Debunked. He gives reasons why Bill 203 should be supported. He says, "For too many children, visual impediments are a burden they cannot describe, let alone fix, but they interfere with behaviour and learning. This bears tremendous costs to school boards and health care."

My next tabling is a document written by Dr. Steven Hoang. Dr. Hoang is from Calgary, and he is an optometrist. He says that he graduated with his doctor of optometry in 2013 and that in the eight months that he has been practising, he has

already seen first hand the number of children with undiagnosed refractive error, eye alignment disorders, and ocular disease. The age range of kids I see for their first ever eye exam ranges from 6 months to 18 years old. The majority of their decreased visual performance are corrected by a simple pair of glasses.

2:50

My next tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a document from the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta. They're the experts on the eye, and they're part of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. They fully support enhanced vision screening designed to capture and treat eye health problems in as many affected children as possible, but they're concerned about the difference between eye exams and vision screening, which we will be dealing with in Committee of the Whole, if we get that far, with Bill 203.

My last tabling is from a blog on the Internet. It's titled Bill 203, Childhood Vision Assessment Act, and it's in full support of Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a review of Childhood Vision Screening in Canada: Public Health Evidence and Practice from the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 2012, where the conclusion indicates that

amblyopia [or weak vision] deserves attention from Public Health. Efforts should be made to maintain existing programs, and provinces without organized screening programs should reconsider their role in the prevention of inequities with regard to preventable blindness in Canadian children.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I believe we have one more, and that's the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you're aware, today in question period I referred to some documents that were on the Prairie Christian Academy website in regard to professional and ethical standards that teachers were asked to sign, where it clearly said that "teachers will uphold the sanctity of marriage, defined as that between a man and a woman, and abstain from homosexual relations and sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage." I've also included in my tabling the philosophy of their Christian education.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Hon. members, in a moment I'll deal with the points of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

The Speaker: The points of order that I have were uttered by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, so let me recognize the hon.

member or someone on her behalf. Hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, citation, and we'll go from there.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I have to go on very long about this, which will make you very happy. I'm citing 23(h), (i), and (j) in our rules. Essentially, these say that references cannot make allegations, impute false or unavowed motives, or use abusive or insulting language.

I listened somewhat to the remarks of the hon. Minister of Education. In my view, my questions were directed to legitimate policies of certain schools that have been fully funded as public schools in this province that had references, in my view, to things that were outside of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act. It's a legitimate place to bring these up. By no means was I disparaging to them, and by no means did I disparage Catholic schools, which are constitutionally protected in this province and the like. In my view, if you look at the Blues, the minister's response to my question was outside of what my thrust was and what the questions were dealing with. I think he should withdraw those comments and move on from there. The questions asked were about legitimate policy and what the government was going to do about what I saw was a clear violation of what we expect out of our education system here in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll be very quick. I don't have the Blues in front of me, so I'm not privy to what the exact conversation was. If I remember correctly, the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* asked his questions, stated his opinion about private schools. The minister got up and gave his opinion and sat down. I don't think that at any point were his remarks disparaging. I don't think he made any allegations against the member. It was just a response to a question that was asked by the member.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I'm at a bit of a disadvantage as well in that I don't have the full Blues of that exchange. What I do have suggests that the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* did rise at approximately 2:20 p.m. and said words that approximated the following: Mr. Minister, does your ministry approve of these policies, or do you just turn a blind eye to the practice of what is actually happening? It goes on before that, and it goes on after that. We'll have to wait for the official Blues or *Hansard* tomorrow.

In response to that – again, I hope I'm not paraphrasing here – I think the hon. minister stood, that being the Minister of Education, and said something about the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* doesn't believe in choice and doesn't believe in giving parents the right to choose or words to that effect. We'll just have to wait until the final words come out.

Let me just say this, hon. members. In this House we hear every day people disagreeing with each other about what they say, about what they believe in. We often have two different versions of the same account. We've had the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* clarify his position. We've had the government member clarify his. I'll review the Blues as well. If there's anything further on this, then I'll raise it again tomorrow. Otherwise, the ruling today stands as a clarification of the points, and we're going to move on with Orders of the Day.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Big-city Charter

- Q1. Ms Blakeman:
What progress has been made on the formal commitment to develop a big-city charter, announced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in a government news release on June 18, 2012?

Property Tax Rates

- Q2. Ms Blakeman:
Which 10 municipalities had the highest property tax rates in Alberta for 2012 and 2013 calendar years?

Child Care Spaces

- Q4. Dr. Swann:
As of January 1, 2014, how many licensed child care program spaces and approved family day home spaces are there in each of Edmonton, Calgary, and the rest of Alberta?

Travel, Meal, and Hospitality Expense Policy

- Q5. Mr. Kang:
Has the government received a report from the Information and Privacy Commissioner on the government's travel, meal, and hospitality expenses policy announced on September 5, 2012, and if so, what are the commissioner's recommendations?

Oil and Gas Pipeline Spills

- Q6. Ms Blakeman:
How many oil and gas pipeline spills, leaks, or ruptures have occurred in Alberta per year from January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2013?

Municipal Flood-prone Lands

- Q10. Ms Blakeman:
Which municipalities in Alberta have lands that are classified as flood prone?

Public-sector Pension Plans

- Q11. Mr. Hehr:
As of January 1, 2014, how many active members and retired members are in each of the following public-sector pension plans: the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, the management employees pension plan, and the special forces pension plan?

English as a Second Language Students

- Q15. Mr. Hehr:
In Alberta how many English as a second language students were registered in each of the school years from 2010-11 to 2012-13 inclusive, and of those, how many will continue beyond the five years that are totally funded by the school board?

Home Inspectors for Resale Properties

- Q16. Mr. Kang:
How many home inspection businesses or individual inspectors for resale properties were operating in Alberta when the home inspection business regulation came into force on September 1, 2011, and how many are operating in Alberta as of January 1, 2014?

Home Inspectors for Resale Properties

- Q17. Mr. Kang:
Since the home inspection business regulation came into force on September 1, 2011, how many complaints has Service Alberta received about home inspection businesses or individual inspectors for resale properties as of January 1, 2014?

Home Inspector Licence Revocation

- Q18. Mr. Kang:
Since the home inspection business regulation came into force on September 1, 2011, how many home inspection businesses or individual inspectors for resale properties have had their licences revoked by Service Alberta as of January 1, 2014?

Children Living in Poverty

- Q19. Dr. Swann:
What criteria does the government use to classify children as living in poverty?

Children Living in Poverty

- Q20. Dr. Swann:
What is the government's estimate of how many Alberta children are living in poverty as of January 1, 2014?

Children Escaping from Poverty

- Q21. Dr. Swann:
What criteria does the government use to determine whether a child has escaped poverty?

Elimination of Child Poverty

- Q22. Dr. Swann:
What is the government's projection of how much money it will need to invest to eliminate child poverty in five years in connection with Together We Raise Tomorrow, Alberta's poverty reduction strategy announced in June 2013, and to which programs, services, and community resources will this funding be allocated?

3:00

Municipal Flood Notice

- Q23. Ms Blakeman:
In relation to the June 2013 flood how many hours' notice did the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development give to each of the affected municipalities that flooding was either possible or imminent?

Evaluation of Flood-proofed Houses

- Q24. Ms Blakeman:
How many safety codes officers in Alberta have been specifically trained to evaluate homes affected by the June

2013 flood and assess whether they have been flood-proofed to a sufficient degree to warrant removal of the notice that the government has placed on the titles to those properties?

Occupational Health and Safety Officers

- Q25. Mr. Hehr:
As of January 1, 2014, how many of the 30 new occupational health and safety, OHS, officers announced by the government on March 4, 2011, have been hired, and what is the total number of OHS officers?

Employment Standards Officers

- Q26. Mr. Hehr:
As of January 1, 2014, how many of the six new employment standards, ES, officers announced by the government on August 10, 2011, have been hired, what is the total number of ES officers, and what was the total number on August 10, 2011?

Family and Community Engagement Councils

- Q27. Dr. Swann:
What is the projected net financial result of dissolving the child and family services authorities and persons with developmental disabilities community boards, establishing family and community engagement councils, and transferring responsibility for service delivery to the Ministry of Human Services?

Alberta Works Caseloads

- Q28. Dr. Swann:
How much have caseloads for Alberta Works decreased or increased from April 1, 2008, to April 1, 2013?

Open Data Portal Visits

- Q29. Mr. Kang:
How many people have visited the Alberta open data portal since it was launched in May 2013, and what was the most searched item?

Government Management Positions

- Q30. Mr. Hehr:
As of January 1, 2014, how many government management positions have been eliminated since April 1, 2013, and how many are anticipated to be eliminated by March 31, 2014?

Disaster Recovery Compensation Notice

- Q31. Ms Blakeman:
For those property owners who received disaster recovery program compensation in 2013, what is the wording of the notice the government will place on the titles to those properties?

Disaster Recovery Committee

- Q32. Ms Blakeman:
Who are the members of the government's Disaster Recovery Committee, the body referenced in section 2.2.2 of the Alberta disaster assistance guidelines and section 7(3) of the disaster recovery regulation?

Disaster Recovery Program, 2013

- Q33. Ms Blakeman:
As of January 1, 2014, how many homes in southern Alberta were deemed or estimated to be eligible to apply for disaster recovery program compensation in relation to the June 2013 flood, and of those, how many submitted applications for compensation, how many were offered compensation, and how many accepted the offered amount of compensation?

Disaster Recovery Program, 2010

- Q34. Ms Blakeman:
As of January 1, 2014, how many disaster recovery program compensation claims from the 2010 flood in southern and central Alberta were appealed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs pursuant to section 8 of the disaster recovery regulation, and how many of those resulted in a reversal or modification of a previous decision made by either the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's director of recovery operations or the managing director?

Disaster Recovery Program, 2013

- Q35. Ms Blakeman:
As of January 1, 2014, of the total number of southern Alberta residents who applied for disaster recovery program compensation in relation to the June 2013 flood, how many have requested a formal review of their files by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's, AEMA, director of recovery operations, and how many have subsequently requested that a decision on their file by the AEMA director of recovery operations be reviewed by the AEMA managing director pursuant to section 7 of the disaster recovery regulation, and how many have subsequently requested that a decision on their file by the AEMA managing director be reviewed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs pursuant to section 8 of the disaster recovery regulation?

Municipal Requests for Flood Protection Assistance

- Q36. Ms Blakeman:
How many municipalities requested financial or technical assistance from the government for riverbank stabilization or flood protection for the period between the southern Alberta flood that occurred in June 2005 and the flood of June 2013?

Disaster Recovery Program, 2013

- Q37. Ms Blakeman:
As of January 1, 2014, what is the average length of time that it has taken to conclude disaster recovery program compensation claims in relation to the June 2013 flood, and what is the average compensation that has been paid?

Disaster Recovery Program, 2010

- Q38. Ms Blakeman:
As of January 1, 2014, how many disaster recovery program compensation claims are outstanding from the 2010 flood in southern and central Alberta?

Disaster Recovery Program, 2011

- Q39. Ms Blakeman:
As of January 1, 2014, how many disaster recovery program

compensation claims are outstanding from the May 2011 wildfire in Slave Lake?

LandLink Consulting Ltd.

Q40. Ms Blakeman:

What was the commencement date of LandLink Consulting Ltd.'s current five-year contract with the government to administer the province's disaster recovery program?

LandLink Consulting Ltd.

Q41. Ms Blakeman:

What positions did Barry Giffen and Rick Thrall, LandLink Consulting Ltd.'s president and managing partner respectively, hold when they were employed by the government of Alberta?

Full-day Kindergarten Costs

Q3. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

What is the government's projected estimate of the cost to implement full-day kindergarten in Alberta?

Mr. Hehr: I'm going to move Question 3. With Question 3 now moved, I think this has been a long-standing provision in this province. Actually, the former Premier at least at one time promised that she was going to implement this program. I'm not sure if the government still has plans to do so. Nevertheless, it should have some documents where it has estimated the costs of this program. I'm hoping that they can provide it to allow us on the opposition side of the House to establish whether it is in our best interests, whether we have the funds to do so, and assess the relative merits of it going forward against other priorities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government is currently exploring what the best solution for Alberta students will look like in terms of full-day, every day kindergarten. This includes giving consideration for any projected costs. Until this work has concluded, we don't have an estimate of the costs, unfortunately. Alberta Education is continuing to work with our stakeholders to ensure that we find the best solution for the students.

Funding in Alberta ensures that school authorities can provide flexible programs for their students, including children at the preschool level and children with special needs. I can say that currently Alberta Education provides funding to school authorities that offer 475 hours, which is half-day, of early childhood services programming. School authorities have the flexibility to charge a reasonable fee to cover the costs of any additional programming hours. Funding is also available to school authorities for approved early childhood services programs for children with severe disabilities as young as two and a half as well as programming for ESL learners as young as three and a half. We'll continue to fund the collection of the early development instrument, EDI, data to inform early childhood development policy and programming, which is also part of our planning, as well as the infrastructure piece and the professional capacity that we have in this system to deliver full-day K.

We're also collaborating with Human Services and Health to create an inclusive, early years continuum of evidence-informed strategies, which will focus on achieving four common outcomes, and one of those is a healthy start for children. The second is

children realizing their full development potential when they enter school. The third is parents providing nurturing and stable environments for their young children. The fourth outcome is safe, supportive communities for children to learn, grow, and thrive.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there's lots of work under way and lots yet to do. We just are not at the position where we have definitive projections of costs for this program even though we are still at this point committed to develop it and to deliver it. Therefore, I move that we reject this question.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that's fair enough if the minister hasn't developed a cost projection for full-day kindergarten. I'm surprised because it has been talked about in this province for some time. Nevertheless, if you don't have it, you don't have it. I'm in support of full-day kindergarten. Many jurisdictions have it. I think it provides a benefit to our kids at an earlier age. My hope is that the minister will develop a cost for this program so then we can talk about it as a more real scenario rather than hoping and wishing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 3 lost]

3:10

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Q7. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

As of January 1, 2014, what is the government's estimate of how much the Alberta heritage savings trust fund would be worth if it had consistently transferred 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue into the fund every year since 1976?

Mr. Hehr: The reason why I ask this question is, I guess, fairly clear. At one point in time it was this long-serving government's mandate, put forward by former Premier Lougheed, that as a principle this should in fact happen. In my view, it was a reasonable public policy piece given that we know that once a barrel of oil is taken out of the ground, you never have that barrel of oil to sell again. So having some of that money transferred into a provincial wealth fund was good public policy. We've seen over the course of time that the government has failed miserably in this regard. In fact, we haven't saved a dime in our heritage trust fund since in 1986, and in fact estimates are that if we had kept up with this, our fund would be very substantial instead of the rather, in my view, limited heritage trust fund we have today.

I think the government would have these statistics and figures readily available to them given that they have the information on how much they have brought in and how much they have saved, and it would highlight to us the importance of getting back on track to Lougheed's vision, in fact, maybe even a vision that would be more conservative, paying for what we use with taxes and saving the oil wealth for the future. In any event, I think that's information the government has or could get relatively easily, and it would allow us to look at what we've done and what we're going to do in the future with the wisdom of this information at our fingertips.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government does not prepare calculations of the fund's value under what-if scenarios. Making the 30 per cent assumption would require us to make several other assumptions – you know, "How much did the fund make? What happened in the economy? Where are we going

with the interest rates?" all of those sorts of things – which could've produced a very wide variety of results.

Further, you would have to consider the impact those assumptions would have had on Alberta's fiscal situation at the time given that there were other things going on in the economy. Certainly, in the '80s there were some significant challenges being faced by the government, and certainly in the '90s, Mr. Speaker, there were significant challenges being faced by then Premier Klein and his government. For example, if you set aside 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue every year no matter what, you would have to reduce spending; you would have to increase taxes. I know the hon. member and the party is in that vein, but they'd also have to make changes to the royalty regime to make up the difference.

The idea that Albertans should save is certainly one this government has taken to heart. We passed legislation in this House, Mr. Speaker, last year that would make it mandatory that before we calculated our operating revenue, we had to take savings off the top and put it into the account.

The fact of the matter is that in this budget that we've got before the House today, our savings will grow from \$24 billion today, Mr. Speaker, to \$26 billion, you know, given the financial plan and this three-year business plan. Albertans have told us several times that even in good times and bad times they want us to set some money aside. That means that they wanted to see that legislation. In order for us to continue to do that, it does mean that we're going to be building capital projects using the markets. When you can make 11.6 per cent on your savings and your average debt-servicing costs are around 3 and a half per cent, that makes good financial sense as well.

To say that, you know, we're going to spend a lot of time on what-if scenarios of, "Gee, if it would've been this or it would've been that, what would it be worth?" – what would the federal government have done, Mr. Speaker? We don't know that. I mean, we could've created a considerable target on our backs.

Another thing needs to be answered when they do these comparisons of Norway and these sorts of things come up. Number one, Norway has considerable sales tax, some 20-plus per cent sales tax, and the highest income tax in Europe, probably, Mr. Speaker. They made a conscious decision not to use any nonrenewable resource in their operating, day-to-day expenditures even though they do actually balance their budget every year by drawing from their fund, and it is their pension fund.

The other thing to remember, Mr. Speaker, is that roughly 55 per cent of the economic benefit generated from Albertans' energy resources is actually attributed to the federal government. What if we were to change the assumption and say, "Well, maybe we shouldn't do that"? There are a lot of what-ifs in that kind of a question, frankly. Therefore, we are recommending that this written question be rejected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always interesting when you hear the government trying to defend what has happened with our oil and gas revenues and how come there was so little saved over the course of the last 42 years. I think we were treated to another one of those, I guess, apologies for that, in my view, for the not very reasonable amount of savings that is currently found. You know, I'm not on the government side, and I don't have access to these figures, but from what I've gathered, we've taken in over \$375 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue and have only managed to save \$16 billion. At this point

in time we are headed for a \$21 billion debt. I think that if we can't really honestly look at ourselves and provide these numbers and try and get a handle on what we should be doing with our nonrenewable resource revenue, well, that's concerning to me.

Nevertheless, I accept the hon. minister's explanation for what it is and understand that the government is not interested at this time in putting that information out in the light of day.

[Written Question 7 lost]

Debt-servicing Limit

Q8. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

Using the formula in section 6 of the Fiscal Management Act for the calculation of the debt-servicing limit for a fiscal year with respect to outstanding capital borrowing, what is the government's calculation of its debt-servicing limit for the 2013-14 fiscal year, and how much money can the government borrow in the 2013-14 fiscal year before it reaches this debt-servicing limit?

Mr. Hehr: I will say here that this is actually an important piece of knowledge for the opposition to learn because, really, should the government wish to or should the government need to or the like, there's always an ability for the government to borrow money. Now, the government did change our current financing rules from ones that were very clear and very easy to understand and ones that, like we heard about in question period, former Finance minister Jim Dinning preferred and was able to easily calculate what our net position was in terms of debt and revenue. The new rules are, in my view, less clear. You know, I think there are many people who have stated that. I think, honestly, I read in the paper that the hon. Minister of Justice would prefer those old, simple accounting rules again and many other people who would be surprising given that they were formerly part of the government of the day.

Nevertheless, we would have this number in a clear, concise manner for us to understand sort of how this new act works – what the debt-servicing limits are, how it impacts government's ability to go forward, and how it impacts, you know, what our obligations are given that we are headed for a \$21 billion debt by 2016-2017 – and what the triggers are in this act and the like given the substantial changes that have occurred in our financial accounting practices in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is actually referring to section 6 of the Fiscal Management Act, which states:

The debt-servicing costs of the Government for a fiscal year in respect of outstanding capital borrowing must not exceed 3% of the average of the actual operational revenue for the fiscal year and the previous 2 fiscal years.

The hon. member went on at length to talk about how confused he is about the financial statements that are, I guess, currently within the purview of this Legislature in the budget, and I guess it's understandable that if he's that confused, he failed to recognize that the answer to his question is actually in the budget documents for the fiscal year 2014-15.

I would also add, Mr. Speaker, that the limit on debt-servicing costs for 2013-14 is also already available online in the 2013-14 fiscal plan, as are the forecast debt-servicing costs. It is all online.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I would add to this commentary is that in 2003, as part of an attempt to move closer to public-sector accounting rules and presentations, we actually went to consolidated financial statements. We actually moved closer to the public-sector accounting rules. Previous ministers of Finance, frankly, didn't probably follow the same standard because we moved to it in 2003. So it is totally understandable that this might be a little different than some of the presentations from the '70s or the '80s or the '90s or perhaps even some of the early 2000s.

I guess I'm having difficulty understanding that the hon. member, as the critic for Finance, would suggest that the public-sector accounting rules are to him confusing and hard to understand. Yet the University of Toronto just recently released a commentary on a report that they did where they actually called on provincial governments to do what municipal governments have been doing for some period of time, and that is to separate capital from operating. They actually called on provincial governments, Mr. Speaker, to be more clear and concise and more detailed in their reporting.

Part of the question the hon. member is asking is about the detail around debt-servicing costs. Mr. Speaker, in previous presentations of our budgets we didn't even allude to those things. We have been borrowing for some period of time. To suggest that we're now going to have additional borrowing, that we might not have had in the past, would be wrong because the \$20 billion that they're referring to also includes P3s. We don't know the balance of P3s to capital debt, what that will be, because we haven't reviewed those projects. P3s are debt, and they have been on our books since somewhere around 2003-2004. To suggest that we're just going into there is some of the misrepresentation that has been presented by the Wildrose Alliance Party and others, I guess.

The other thing that I have to put on the record: to suggest that we're doing this and that there are no other options. There are options. There are options, Mr. Speaker. We've readily admitted that the options we have are to follow the Wildrose platform of not building, deferring the capital into the out-years. That's an option. You wouldn't have to borrow. You'd be able to do some of the capital planning to the out-years, granted. The other option is what the Liberals have asked for, which is to increase the taxes. That's another option. We could increase taxes, generate more revenue, and put cash into long-term assets. No financial expert in today's economy at today's interest rates believes that that's the thing to do.

The option that we chose was to leverage a triple-A credit rating, that is the envy of the world. The option that we chose was to provide taxpayers with value and assets today. We said to them that it will follow four very simple rules. One, it has to be for capital. Two, it cannot exceed the debt-servicing cap, which the hon. member is referring to, which is in the documents, which is online, Mr. Speaker, which is all very, very clear. Three, it has to protect that triple-A credit rating. Four, it has to have a repayment plan, which is also, I would add for all hon. members, in the document called the budget, which we are debating in the House today.

Mr. Speaker, I would reject this question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was a nice story. It doesn't ring true, in my view, on how the long-running government has essentially engaged in a practice of intergenerational theft, which has basically amounted to spending

all the oil wealth in one generation. Really, if there's anything else that they can take credit for, that would be about it, okay? It was a nice story to try and defend that.

Nevertheless, I'll go look for those numbers on the limits on how much debt we can take on in any calendar year, and if it's there, it's there. I stand by my earlier commentary about changing the financial rules. In fact, virtually every Tory Finance minister has stated on the record that this practice is against openness and transparency. In fact, I believe the C.D. Howe Institute stated exactly the same thing, where they said that this government's financial rules and regulations make no sense and that it's sheer and utter obfuscation to suggest otherwise and the like.

Nevertheless, I'll leave it at that and go from there. It is what it is, Mr. Speaker. If the minister says that that information is there, I will go and take a look.

Thank you.

[Written Question 8 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Cancer Incidence Rates

Q9. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted. Which 10 municipalities had the highest leukemia, lymphoma, and lung cancer incidence rates in Alberta for each of the years from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2013?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is in the interest of looking at the potential for environmental impacts on cancer rates, especially air emissions in this particular set of diseases, and trying to look for any trends across the province in which some communities might be more exposed to coal emissions, to industrial emissions, to refinery emissions, and to sort out any significant trends in cancer rates, those three being the most sensitive indicators to some environmental pollutants.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health or someone on behalf of. The hon. Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have an amendment to table. Would you like it now, or would you like me to speak to it first?

The Speaker: Now is good.

Hon. members, the associate minister will be moving an amendment, and I wonder if we could just have him read it aloud and then continue with his debate on the amendment. Is that acceptable? It appears it is.

Hon. associate minister, why don't you continue with the amendment, reading it aloud, and, pages, will you distribute the written copy?

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to read it. I have some short comments that will follow. The amendment will read:

Which municipalities in Alberta had the highest leukemia, lymphoma, and lung cancer incidence rates for the period from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2005, and for the period from January 1, 2006, to December 31, 2011?

I will now give the reasons as to why I trust that this will be acceptable to the House.

I first of all want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his written question identified in Written Question 9. In the question the hon. member asked, “Which 10 municipalities had the highest leukemia, lymphoma, and lung cancer incidence rates in Alberta for each of the years from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2013?” Mr. Speaker, the reason for the amendment is that the question cannot be answered as written. The Alberta cancer registry is the only provincial repository for cancer data. However, updating and verifying the data is very complex, and the data for 2012-2013 is not yet available for analysis.

Also, where the case counts or populations are small, the data may become identifiable and compromise a patient’s privacy. Finally, municipal populations and cancer rates vary widely across the province and from year to year, and any instability in numbers may lead to misleading results. That is why years are routinely combined as a means of protecting privacy while also providing reliable information. To protect people’s privacy and to produce meaningful results, it would be necessary to combine the data asked for in Written Question 9 by five-year increments.

That is the reason for the amendment as read prior to my comments and now distributed here in the House. So, Mr. Speaker and hon. members, amending the question this way would ensure that we can provide a meaningful answer to what is a very serious question.

With that, I conclude my remarks for now, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Yes. I’ll accept that amendment, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 9 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to move Written Question 12.

First Nations Education

Q12. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

What progress has been made on the First Nations-Alberta-Canada February 2010 memorandum of understanding on aboriginal education?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is building on a long-term strategic action plan that Alberta arranged through an MOU with First Nations in Alberta in September 2013. Treaty 6 chiefs abstained from voting to approve the plan; however, all other parties – Treaty 7, Treaty 8, the government of Alberta, and the government of Canada – agreed to move forward. The question relates to a number of related questions. What work has been done since the Treaty 6 folks left the table to reintegrate them in the discussions? With the 2014 federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development’s introduction of Bill C-33, the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act, I guess the question is: how will that affect the memorandum of understanding between the province and the First Nations? That bill, the federal bill, would provide \$1.9 billion over three years, starting in 2015-16, to 600 First Nations across Canada. Again, how will the federal bill affect the current MOU for First Nations

education in Alberta? Will Alberta chip in for any funding shortfalls during the interim?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Written Question 12 be amended by striking out “on aboriginal education” and substituting “for First Nations education in Alberta.” The amended written question would read as follows:

What progress has been made on the First Nations-Alberta-Canada February 2010 memorandum of understanding for First Nations education in Alberta?

I move to amend the question just to more accurately reflect the proper name of the MOU.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: I accept the amendment.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in my haste to move things along because we have so many written questions, we went straight to a vote on the motion as amended. More properly, we should be voting on the amendment first, so let’s do that now.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 12 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to move Written Question 13.

School Teacher Staffing

Q13. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

How many full-time, part-time, and substitute teachers were/are there in the public and separate school systems in Alberta for the 2012-13 and current school years?

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, actually, in estimate debates I received a graph from the hon. Minister of Education which may in part answer this question. But the reason for it is that there have been a great many students arriving in Alberta over the course of the last number of years, with a lessening emphasis on the amount of money that is going to education, at least from a baseline year of 2008-2009. The Alberta Teachers’ Association put out a graph where if we had kept up with that funding allocation, there would be substantially more teachers in this province than we currently have. Getting information on where our education system is in terms of the number of students and the number of teachers is very important to assess what is happening in our classrooms in terms of our classroom sizes and the amount of, I guess, pressure on schools, school boards, and teachers in this province to deliver programming. Having an actual number would assist us in assessing what’s working in education, where we are, and where we need to go.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I move that Written Question 13 be amended by striking out “were/are there in the public and separate school systems in Alberta for the 2012-13 and current school years” and substituting that with “were there in the public and separate school systems in Alberta for 2012-13.” The amended written question would read as follows:

How many full-time, part-time, and substitute teachers were there in the public and separate school systems in Alberta for 2012-13?

Mr. Speaker, Education collects statistical information on teacher employment from school authorities throughout the year and at the end of the year. This data is used to maintain a current and accurate teacher registry system in accordance with section 15 of the Certification of Teachers Regulation. We don’t have the year-end results for this current school year, obviously, so I move to amend the question as the final counts for this school year, 2013-14, are not available to us until August of 2014.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, an amendment to Written Question 13 is now being circulated as far as I know. The minister has read it into the record. Is there any debate on the amendment?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: I accept the amendment. I thank the minister for his co-operation in this matter, and I look forward to getting that information in due course.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 13 as amended carried]

School Bus Transportation Costs

Q14. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

What is the average school bus transportation cost per student in both the public and separate school systems in Alberta for the 2012-13 and current school years?

Mr. Hehr: The reason we ask this question is because increasingly, as a result of this government’s failure to build schools in neighbourhoods where kids live, we’re seeing that not only busing costs faced by local schools boards but that busing times are increasing for children who ride the bus to school. This is a concern for us in that we believe it’s in the best interest to have kids at a school in their own community. This is not happening at this present time, so accordingly we want to figure out what is in the best interests of our children in terms of busing, how much this costs, and whether this is really an efficient use of government resources and in the best interests of our children going forward.

I also note that many school boards are having difficulty as a result of the fuel contingency agreement, that was in place in previous years, no longer being available. It means more costs are on them, and they have an inability to then hire teachers and build schools and the like and all of those things that school boards are tasked to do. In any event, that’s why we believe that information is pertinent, and we’re hoping that the minister can provide us with that information.

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to move an amendment to this question as well. Maybe the pages want to distribute this while I move that Written Question 14 be amended by striking out “and current school years” and substituting “school year.” The amended question would read as follows:

What is the average school bus transportation cost per student in both the public and separate school systems in Alberta for the 2012-13 school year?

I know the pages are getting their exercise here today with all these amendments.

Mr. Speaker, this is just similar to the last amendment that we requested. It’s a good question. We’re happy to provide the information. We just don’t have it until the end of the school year, and we can provide this information after the end of the school year just as we can with the previous question, Written Question 13.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the amendment to Written Question 14 is now being circulated. Are we ready for the discussion anyway? Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, hon. minister, for the assistance with my grammar in writing the question as well as providing the information to me in due course. I accept this amendment and thank him for it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, you have the amendment, and it’s been accepted by the original mover and, of course, by the original sponsor.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 14 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Flood Mitigation Measures

M2. Ms Blakeman:

A return showing a copy of the report of the provincial advisory panel on community flood mitigation that proposed \$830 million in flood mitigation measures at the Alberta Flood Mitigation Symposium held in Calgary on October 4, 2013.

Flood/Disaster Insurance Studies

M3. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing copies of government studies or proposals related to the establishment of flood or disaster insurance in Alberta that were prepared between June 1, 2013, and January 1, 2014.

Task Force for Teaching Excellence

M7. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing copies of documents outlining the criteria and process that Leger, The Research Intelligence Group, used to select participants for the 14 public consultations related to the Task Force for Teaching Excellence that commenced on October 1, 2013.

LandLink Consulting Performance Review

M8. Ms Blakeman:

A return showing a copy of the performance review of LandLink Consulting Ltd. referenced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs during the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship's consideration of the ministry's 2013-14 estimates on April 17, 2013.

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

Survey Results for Budget 2014 Priorities

M1. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the responses that the government received from Albertans through its online survey on their priorities for Budget 2014.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my view, how Albertans respond to these online surveys is very pertinent information to opposition parties as it would have a tendency to show Albertans' responses to budgets and what they believe to be in their best interests for their future in terms of how much revenue we bring in, how much spending we do, and how much debt we accumulate. The government collects this information. I assume they would be able to have this information put out to opposition parties to understand truly what Albertans believe or don't believe, frankly, on the current state of our finances. I think this information is in the hands of the government, and if they could provide it, it would be most helpful to all concerned in the name of openness and transparency.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Motion for a Return 1 this consultation report again – and I almost hate to say this – is already available online. The What We Heard report provides details on the background and the purpose of the prebudget consultation. It provides a summary of the online survey results and a summary of open house results. The report also provides numerous anecdotal responses made by participants, even those that perhaps we didn't necessarily agree with. Given that much of this information is already online, I see really no reason to send a member the individual surveys filled out last fall by more than 2,000 Albertans.

It might be of interest to the House, Mr. Speaker, to know that the very first question on there was whether or not we should be using capital, you know, basically borrowing for capital, when it made financial sense. The overwhelming response on the survey was yes, which I thought was kind of interesting as well as some other interesting things. I'm sure the hon. member will like to read about the fact that we want to keep taxes low and the fact that we want to build the infrastructure even if it does mean going into capital debt. It's interesting that 2,000 Albertans surveyed would say that given what you hear from across the way sometimes.

Therefore, I do recommend that Motion for a Return 1 be rejected, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have before us Motion for a Return 1, and we have the hon. sponsor to close debate on that.

Mr. Hehr: I categorically disagree with the story that was just told by the hon. member. With the deepest respect I don't think it would take his ministry that much in man-hours or time to let us

have all 2,000 of those survey examples. I have every confidence that the ministry may have – I won't say "did" – tended to see more positively some of the responses from Albertans than the average person in this Legislature or, in fact, the average person here in Alberta. I tend to think the government likes to see things that they want to see in responses, not as they actually are. So I take things like that with a grain of salt, what the hon. member just informed me of. I think it'd be very easy for him to click a button and to compile all of this information and get it to us.

I think that was their mandate, to be open and transparent, and then we, the opposition, could go through it and actually see what was said because frankly, sir, I have difficulties with the postulation that the government just condensed everything neatly into a couple of anecdotal sentences that said that Albertans think everything is sunshine and roses and lollipops in this province, because that's not what I'm hearing on the street, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

Online Portal for Registry Services

M4. Mr. Kang moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any documents relating to the implementation plan for an online portal for registry services in 2014.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall or someone on behalf of. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall I think the request is eminently sensible. It talks to openness and accountability, and I look forward to the minister's response.

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We reviewed this motion for a return. We do have an initiative under way for services to be made available online through the government-wide service portal, but we're still doing a lot of work on the consultations and on what exactly that would look like. We are planning some fundamental changes, but we are nowhere near any sort of implementation phase, so we have no document, so we're suggesting to members that we reject this motion for a return.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm a little surprised on behalf, again, of the Member for Calgary-McCall that we haven't made more progress on this. This has been talked about for at least six months. I would have thought that we would have at least some indication of where this government is going on the portal. I'm disappointed, I guess, is what I would say, and I hope that the minister will provide us with that information as soon as possible.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

Tax Rates for Small Brewers

M5. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of proposals to amend tax rates for small brewers that were developed by the government between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2013.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, as you will recall, there have been many proposals made by both small and mid-sized brewers in this province who believe that the rules and regulations around beer

brewing in this province do not foster a vibrant local brewing industry. I've asked questions about this before, and there still appears to be a great many people involved in the brewing industry who do not find that the rules and regulations incent a local brewing market. They point to many things, like the limits on the amount of production a company must have. The government gives out tax breaks to organizations to actually set up in other jurisdictions outside of Alberta, that appear to make no sense to many of the small brewers in this province. At one time I noted that the former deputy premier, back approximately a year ago, stated that he was actively working on this file to try and bring changes in. I do know that the government brought in some changes, but we're looking specifically at the proposals to amend the rates for the small brewers that were developed by the government during this time period.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are at this point in time no changes being presented. As it relates to the proposals mentioned in Motion for a Return 5, the requested information would constitute advice from officials. On that basis it should remain confidential, and we recommend that Motion for a Return 5 be rejected.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

Spirit Distillation Rules

M6. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of proposals to amend Alberta's spirit distillation rules that were developed by the government between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2013.

Mr. Hehr: This is similar to my last proposal, on the small brewers in this province, so I'm certain I'm going to get the same answer from the hon. President of Treasury Board.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Nevertheless, the reason why I'm pushing the government on these – although they have made some changes, especially to the spirit distillation side of things. The recent changes to encourage some other people to get into this business, I think, were a step in the right direction. I'm looking for more robust changes, again, to look at the small and mid-sized brewers in this province, who I believe are unnecessarily penalized in our system from actually developing a local brewing economy that would ensure that local employees are hired, that local products are used, and that people have more of a variety of Alberta-based brews and spirits.

Nevertheless, I know what the answer from the hon. minister of Treasury is going to be, so in order to move this along, I'm going to withdraw this motion for return so he doesn't have to get up and tell me that this is a private matter. I'll think about how to rework this question next time to maybe get some information. So I'm withdrawing the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Then for the record you are withdrawing Motion for a Return 6? It can't be withdrawn? We have to deal with it, hon. member, so we'll just be quick.

The President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: He was right with his assumption, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we reject this.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Just for the record, then, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, did you care to close?

Mr. Hehr: No. That's fine.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

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

Bill 203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act

[Debate adjourned April 7: Mrs. Towle speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake had some speaking time left.

I would look, then, for the next speaker. I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was taken aback on the change of direction there. With regard to this bill we have had great discussion in our caucus, and what I've certainly agreed to – and we all have our individual votes to deal with it. I would then support this to take it to Committee of the Whole to see what changes the hon. member brings and keep a very open mind on how this bill progresses.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just to keep the rotation going, I'll recognize the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock next.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this bill forward. The purpose of Bill 203 is to promote comprehensive and rigorous efforts to identify early vision issues in children so that they do not become a problem later in life. Specifically, this bill would require a vision exam for all children before they enter first grade. This bill also encourages the use of the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, with which some hon. members might be familiar.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North has never swayed in her advocacy for vision assessment in children, and I know I'm not alone in applauding her dedication. It is no secret that by now vision assessment plays a pivotal role in the success of every child in his or her academic and, eventually, professional pursuits. I am very pleased to be able to say that this government currently does an exemplary job of ensuring that visual health is its central focus in schools and pediatrics. It seems to me that the bill this hon. member has presented in this House is meant to build on our already strong accomplishments.

Of course, the plan outlined in Bill 203 would require the in-depth involvement of teachers and administrators, who are on the ground in our public schools. No plan can be implemented successfully without giving these dedicated individuals a central role. Teachers in particular are well positioned to identify potential problems and difficulties that children face given the amount of time spent with them. Obviously, teachers are physically in the classrooms with our children and have the

opportunity to make assessments of the child's progress on a day-to-day basis. Teachers are typically the first to be aware of any difficulties a child may be having. The early eye exam proposed in Bill 203 would assist teachers in making assessments as accurately as possible. This, in turn, would enable teachers to make the appropriate recommendations to parents and school administrators.

4:00

Almost 80 per cent of children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam, yet vision problems have been identified as one of the major factors in limiting a child's ability to learn and succeed. For the first 12 years of a child's life 80 per cent of the child's learning is visual. Furthermore, it is no secret that good vision and good grades are strongly correlated. There is some interesting research that has been done in this area. Working out of the University of Lethbridge, Dr. Charles Boulet and Dr. Noella Piquette have argued that if there is an error in or impediment to sensory perception, higher cognitive functions such as reading, memory, emotional awareness, and impulse control can be affected. Dr. Boulet and Dr. Piquette both advance the argument that comprehensive vision assessment for children entering the 12-year academic cycle ought to be treated as a fundamental human right.

In schools functional defects in the visual process impair reading acquisition and learning. They also influence other behaviour. Children are affected by different types of impairments to eyesight and to visual function. The degree to which children are impacted varies according to the depth and nature of impediments present and to some degree ethnicity. Some children are at a greater disadvantage simply because of the greater visual demands of the modern classroom. Specifically, the increased use of smart classrooms and digital technology can pose potential problems for some students based upon their visual needs. These visual impediments to learning may include dyslexia, visual stress, and scotopic sensitivity syndrome. These are rarely detected in common eyesight screenings and are associated with limited socioeconomic success and increased criminality.

Significant visual impediments to learning limit academic and life outcomes, with some demographics affected by a greater prevalence of reading impediments. This study finds that this presents added difficulties for various public agencies at all levels of the government. Matters are complicated further when children who are afflicted with visual impairments choose not to report the problem. This is a decision that can stem from frustration and embarrassment. Teachers are trained and experienced in noticing the manifestations of this frustration in student performance. This is why they may be our single most valuable resource when it comes to monitoring how our kids are developing.

As the situation currently stands, the success of the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program relies heavily on teachers who work closely with parents. Each fall kindergarten teachers send information packages home with each of their students to be received by parents. Parents are encouraged to book appointments for their children to have their eyes examined. The program has gained endorsement from every public school division across Alberta. Free eyeglasses are also offered to kindergarten students when prescribed by an eye doctor.

One question to ask now is whether this is a sufficient application of what our teachers are potentially capable of. While the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program has enjoyed some admirable success, we may be able to do more. Achieving universal vision assessment prior to grade 1 for all students would be a remarkable accomplishment and would certainly be something that we could be proud of.

But as important and worthy a goal as the promotion of vision health in children may be, we ought not to overlook the additional positive impact that could result from implementing a strategy such as Bill 203 proposes. Children benefit greatly when there exists a close and constructive relationship between their parents and their teachers. Through Bill 203 we can offer another avenue that joins both parents and teachers together by being thoroughly invested in students' vision assessments and further nurturing that relationship.

This inclusion could extend to school administrators as well. There is much room opened up by this bill for new ways to more tightly integrate the various elements of the school environment, and this is only to the benefit of students. A system of tight-knit supports is essential for any child's success. What could be better than to foster it with these supports from day one, or rather from grade 1, when children begin their student careers in earnest?

Mr. Speaker, I am very excited by the range of potential this bill promises. It offers an invigorating opportunity to improve the health and lives of children, to improve the academic performance of students, and to foster closer and more effective relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this to the attention of the House today. I also want to reiterate my respect for this hon. member for her continued advocacy for children and students.

With that, I conclude my remarks and look forward to supporting this bill, I hope alongside my hon. colleagues and counterparts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize next the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I just want to say at the onset that, you know, I believe in the spirit of this bill. However, I'm going to outline some of my concerns with the way it's written. I do want to note that I've already heard that amendments are going to be coming forward to strengthen and improve this bill. It begs the question: why didn't the mover of this bill take the time to ensure that we got it right the first time as opposed to tabling a bill and then having amendments come forward?

Having said that, I want to speak to this because I think childhood vision is a very important subject, and it should be addressed and addressed by this government. No child should have to go without a proper vision screening and assessment and without ensuring that they have the proper tools to be successful. I think, you know, the fact is that many of the issues related to vision and vision care can be prevented or fixed, so I thank the member for raising this bill in the House and this issue.

Just to give a quick little recap, Mr. Speaker, I mean, it would legislate all parents to be responsible for having their children's eyes tested before entering grade 1. Now, the parents must provide to the school a form signed by the optometrist or ophthalmologist. Part of the challenge with this first piece is that it places the onus on the parents rather than the school or the health care system within the province as far as tracking this down and getting them to sign off on it.

Now, I recognize that the eye doctor is forbidden from charging parents for the completion of the form, but it doesn't address the actual cost related to the eye exam itself. Alberta health care provides coverage for one visit a year for children up to 19 years of age. It does not address the problem if a child needs follow-up

examinations or if the child must get glasses. I do appreciate that the previous speaker talked about, you know, one pair of eyeglasses being included. I would challenge any member of this Assembly who has children to claim that their kids can go through one set of eyeglasses for a number of years. I think it's more like multiple pairs of glasses as children are children.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that the bill doesn't say anything about the passing on of added administrative costs incurred by the optometrists' offices or the schools themselves with the new paperwork and tracking that would be required.

What the Alberta NDP is looking at, Mr. Speaker, is that instead of forcing parents to obtain a test and the form, the public school system ought to be empowered and funded to provide eye exams, screening exams, for all students going into grade 1. Let's equip the very institutions that all of these young people are coming to to be able to perform these screening exams and assessments right at the school. We'd accomplish the same goals that the legislation is attempting to address, but we'd do it in a way that's more inclusive and putting less of an onus on parents and on families, especially those living in fairly remote parts of the province.

4:10

Many parents may not have the time or the ability to take their children or child to an optometrist. They may be both working during hours of operation, during the day. One question that I have, Mr. Speaker, is: how would these students be accommodated, and would the parents be compensated in any way if they had to take time off work to take their child or children to get these eye exams or screenings done?

Now, the ministry is also able to set the conditions and standards for visual assessment of children who transfer from a school outside of Alberta, where the law is not in effect. A question, Mr. Speaker, is: will this have an effect on students transferring from outside of the province?

This bill as it's currently written, Mr. Speaker, would ensure that all students have their eyes tested before starting grade 1, which is obviously an important part of the learning process, and the Alberta NDP are onboard with ensuring that kids have every tool at their disposal to be successful in school. Obviously, we recognize that if kids, you know, can't see or can't see well, it's going to adversely affect their ability in school to learn and to succeed. Again, a concern, Mr. Speaker, is making the parents responsible for getting their children's eyes tested. You know, some parents may feel the government is telling them that they're unable to adequately parent their child. Additionally, it's true that some children don't have a problem with their vision at this age and may not need an eye exam.

This would also, obviously, greatly increase the workload of optometrists in the province, and it's likely that those costs are going to get passed on to the government or to the consumer. Would we still have to pay for these tests? In fact, the cost would probably go up since now all grade 1 children would be going for an eye exam, where before only some of them were. You know, again, what we're looking at or proposing or asking, Mr. Speaker, is: why can't we just spend this money to be proactive, providing exams in schools rather than reimbursing on the backside? This would also, going again to the backside, increase the amount of paperwork and administration associated with it.

Now, the minister is able to make regulations concerning any additional matter or thing that is necessary in furtherance of this act. Questions for the mover: what's going to be included in this measure? What additional requirements will be issued in regard to vision assessment?

Forcing all parents to have their child's eyes tested and provide the school with proof before they can start grade 1 could be perceived as discriminatory. Now, again, while the NDP supports the objective of having all children get their eyes tested before they enter grade 1 – if children cannot see, obviously they'll fall behind in class – our position, my position, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill goes about this task in the wrong way, that it could be much better.

We're talking about removing barriers to children being successful in school. Instead of forcing parents to go out and get their children examined before they start school, the idea of providing the school system with funding – and I need to make this evidently clear, especially for the Education minister, that there would be dollars to help ensure that schools can provide this service as opposed to just thrusting another demand on our front-line workers and our schools and school boards.

Dr. Swann: Preferably well before the school year.

Mr. Bilous: That's a very good point – thank you – that these exams aren't done all at once on day 1 of the school year, so that we actually have, again, a staggered approach and do this in the most efficient way possible.

Again, you know, let's have optometrists come and test grade 1 students at the beginning of the year. You could stagger it throughout the school system. The approach achieves the same outcome as the bill as it's currently written though it's going to be much more inclusive. We're going to ensure that we're getting all students as opposed to some falling through the cracks.

On that note as well, I just want to note, Mr. Speaker, questions that I do have around: if students don't come to school with a note saying that they got this test, what are the consequences? Are they refused completion of their registration? Are they refused participation in extracurricular activities? What are the consequences? Again, I don't know how punishing our students even further – so now they have inadequate vision in addition to being unable to participate in some activities or even register – is going to be beneficial.

The other point with that, Mr. Speaker, is that if they are prevented from completing the registration, that could mean for school boards that they get fewer dollars because how the funding envelope works is that schools are funded for their student count. But there is a time set on that, and I believe that for the fall it is the end of September. So if there are challenges for a student, where they're not allowed to finish their enrolment at a school, then the school is not going to be able to receive dollars for that student, which could cause problems, obviously, as far as ensuring that the school has enough resources for every student in the classroom, or you know, some schools may even be refusing the student the right to register after the end of September.

Regarding the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, this is a great example of a current program that helps kindergarten children obtain an eye exam and, if needed, complementary glasses. But, again, the challenge with this program, Mr. Speaker, is that it still requires that parents seek out and make an appointment with a participating optometrist.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
I recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to speak on Bill 203 as proposed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. In my view, this is a forward-sighted bill that looks to address a very complex issue, youth

eyesight exams: how they're best administered and how they can make the lives better for those kids if we have these exams and they're universally provided through some mechanism in our society. I applaud the member for putting that bill forward.

I do note that there have been many suggestions here, and probably very valid ones, as to some of the pitfalls of the proposed legislation. I would prefer for us to look at this in a more holistic manner and in the manner of trying to actually rectify a problem and rectify some of the inequalities that are out there in our society. I think we can do that. I think we can do that with some hard work and effort on our amendments to see that this bill survives.

The reason why, in my view, I think it should survive is because of some of the statistics brought up in debate here today. The fact is that by grade 1 80 per cent of kids who are going to our schools here in Alberta have not received an eye exam. That identifies to us a clear problem that exists, and when we as legislators see a clear problem that exists, like kids not getting eye exams, I think that means that we should respond in some form or fashion. The evidence is perfectly clear that children's eye problems if not identified early – and there are arguments that maybe we should even be doing this earlier as a legislative body, that this should actually be happening in some form or fashion. This bill does its best to do that.

So we've identified a problem, we're identifying one mode of solution, and we can see that it will affect kids going forward. When we know that evidence, now what do we do with it? Well, we have to bring in something to ameliorate the circumstances that there are. I think that for us to look at this problem, we have to understand that 20 per cent of parents are getting their kids the help or the eye exam they need. What's the issue with the other parents? Well, I don't know. For some it may be financial. For some it may be otherwise. For some it may be information. Frankly, it doesn't matter. The kids need eye exams.

I believe in the concept of equality of opportunity. Whether you're born in a rich family or a poor family, the government of the day should give kids an opportunity to succeed. They can succeed more easily or more readily by having some form of eye examination, preferably as early as possible.

I was just chatting with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who suggests that even a more practical approach to this matter may be having eye exams at the age of three, when they have their immunizations. Really, is it too late for us to be waiting until ages five or six, when they're in the school system? Should we not be using this opportunity to explore whether that is an option, to have a screening test set up at that time for kids so that they can get the eye help they need at an even younger age, which would allow them to be even more ready for the school system and more ready to develop their potential? I believe that solution is one that in all practicality should be explored, and whether that can be done in this bill or not, I'm not certain. What is clear from this bill is that we have to act on this situation. We have to ensure that kids have access to eye exams and go forward with that.

4:20

Just as one of those interesting things, I look at what our society funds. Once kids get to be six years old, we fund their school. We fund things like postsecondary. We fund things throughout people's lives in the health care system. When we turn 65 and even older, we get some form of a pension cheque or some form of health care. We all know the statistics that the vast majority of health care dollars or probably dollars spent by our government is when people get older. Really, is that the right thing? If we're looking at maximizing the potential of our society going forward,

that would be reversed. Governments would invest much more money in children's lives between the ages of zero and six in terms of learn-through-play programs, in terms of bills like these, which get kids the eye help they need and set them on to really develop their potential. I think this bill also alerts us to that. Why are we often ignoring kids who are zero to six and often dealing with other issues that seem pertinent, but those individuals may actually just have a different ability to have their voices heard? We have to continue to listen and look at what best serves our society going forward and evaluate that.

In any event, I believe this bill has great merit for getting kids the eye exams that they need to succeed. It fits firmly within equality of opportunity. It recognizes that there's a problem out there and that we as legislators have to deal with it. Whether we can get that best placed in Committee of the Whole, I believe we all should bring our best ideas forward through that and try and do that at this time. What we've learned in this Legislature is that kids need eye health and need to be ready for grade 1 and to succeed in school. If somehow it does not succeed – and I'm hoping we can rectify everything there because it's an idea whose time has come – then we move immediately to where this government or some other private member puts forward another idea to get this established here in Alberta.

In any event, those are my thoughts, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much, as always, for the opportunity to take part in debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise today and speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, which has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. I know that children's vision awareness is an issue and that this hon. member is particularly passionate about that issue.

Mr. Speaker, although there is no legislation currently in place that requires school-aged children to undergo vision examinations prior to entering grade 1, few know that Alberta Health fully covers the cost of eye examinations for all children up to age 18. Bill 203 would ensure that by grade 1 children would fully utilize these free Alberta Health eye examinations in order to help reduce potential learning and behavioural difficulties, that are detrimental to children with eyesight impairments.

Specifically, it would mandate a form with proof of examination in order to complete grade 1 enrolment and encourage the use of the Eye See... Eye Learn program. However, this would in no way stop a child from entering school. Essentially, Bill 203 is looking to ensure that childhood vision issues are identified and resolved in order to give each child the best chance at academic success. I am confident that hon. members of this Assembly are well aware that eye examinations are an important public health strategy for a healthy Alberta. Early identification of vision problems is asymptomatic for individuals and allows them to benefit from direct preventative action.

Given the importance of eye screening as a public health strategy it is essential that we examine the work of other jurisdictions such as the United States regarding this important issue. Therefore, I would like to spend some time discussing the work of the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, or AAPOS, as well as the state-by-state vision screening requirements. The goals of that organization involve advancing the quality of children's eye care, supporting the

training of pediatric ophthalmologists, supporting research activities in pediatric ophthalmology, and advancing the care of adults with strabismus.

For those who are unfamiliar with strabismus, it refers to the abnormal alignment of one or both eyes, characterized by a turning inwards or outwards from the nose, thus preventing parallel vision.

In terms of advancing the quality of children's eye care, AAPOS establishes practice guidelines for pediatric ophthalmology at the highest level of competence and ethics, encourages the training of ophthalmologists who are primarily concerned with eye care of children, and fosters concepts that benefit children's eye health through preventative as well as remedial activities.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of vision screening are numerous. They are quick, accurate, cost-efficient, have a high rate of problem detection, and minimize unnecessary referrals. In preschool children, for example, vision screening has been used for the early detection of amblyopia, or lazy eye, the leading cause of monocular blindness in the 20- to 70-year age range in high-income countries. Unfortunately, the benefits of vision screening are either ignored or not well publicized. I say this because almost 80 per cent of children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam. This means that there are numerous children in school right now with undiagnosed vision issues.

I believe Bill 203 would go a long way to correct those undiagnosed vision issues in children. By requiring a form with proof of examination in order to complete grade 1, parents can be assured that their children are not suffering from any undiagnosed eye issues. I want to be clear, though, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 203 would not prevent children from attending school.

According to AAPOS 43 out of the 50 American states have either a state policy, a code, statutes, regulations, or local school board requirements regarding vision screening and tests. For example, Alabama's screening requirements fall under code 16-29-1, which was established in 1965. This code states that the Department of Education and the State Board of Health are to arrange for the examination of each child attending public school in the state, including for "diseases of the ear, eye, nose and throat, mouth and teeth . . . and any disease requiring medical or surgical aid in developing the child into a strong and healthy individual."

California's education code 49452 requires the governing board of a school district to provide for the testing of hearing and vision of each enrolled pupil within the district while education code 49455 requires students to have their vision screened upon enrolment and at least every third year thereafter until completion of the eighth grade.

In Arkansas code 6-18-1501, which governs vision screening, requires all children in pre-K, kindergarten, grades 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 to be given eye exams and vision tests. The code stipulates that "the responsibility for the enforcement of this section rests equally with each school district or public charter school and the parent or guardian of the child." Further, the code details that eye and vision screening shall include the specific tests, procedures, equipment, and instruments approved by the Arkansas Commission on Eye and Vision Care of School-Age Children and the department.

4:30

In Kentucky one section of Bill 706, An Act Relating to Early Childhood Development, requires that all children three to six years of age entering public preschool or public school for the first time have an eye examination by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist no later than January 1 of the school year.

This section of Bill 706 states that "a vision examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist . . . shall be required by the Kentucky Board of Education" and that "the administrative regulations shall require evidence that a vision examination that meets the criteria prescribed by the Kentucky Board of Education has been performed." Given the existence of Bill 706 in the state Legislature it is clear that the Kentucky General Assembly identified problems with vision as an important factor limiting children's ability to learn and succeed and decided to act upon these problems. I believe that Bill 203 provides our Legislative Assembly with the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of other jurisdictions such as Alabama, Arkansas, California, and Kentucky.

It is unacceptable that almost 80 per cent of children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam. Bill 203 could help ensure that any previously undiagnosed vision issues are corrected prior to grade 1. Mr. Speaker, one of the pillars of the building Alberta plan is investing in families and communities. This pillar specifically mentions that every child should have the opportunity for the best possible start in life. By moving forward with Bill 203 in this Assembly today, we are keeping our commitment to Albertans. We are illustrating to them that current and future generations of Alberta's schoolchildren will have the tools that they need to succeed with every step that they take into the classroom. For too long children have been allowed to enter school without proper vision assessment.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing forward Bill 203. Once again her passion for children's issues is nothing short of inspirational. I hope all hon. members of the Assembly will rise today and join me in supporting Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that if I were here today and didn't have my glasses with me, I wouldn't be able to read my notes off this page. As a young child when you don't know what you're missing before you have an eye exam and get your glasses, I think your mind tends to wander. You find some ways to be able to occupy yourself because you really can't focus on the words on the page. So I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing childhood vision health for debate in this Legislature.

Bill 203, as we've heard, would require a comprehensive vision assessment by grade 1 to help reduce potential learning and behavioural difficulties that affect children with impairment. My colleague has brought this bill to our attention because many children of school age have vision-related problems, and many more begin school without a complete and comprehensive eye exam. Grade 1s would do well to be encouraged to use the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program. Currently, the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program provides kindergarten students with a free pair of glasses, when needed, after undergoing an examination. I would think that all parents would welcome that kind of support.

As one of my colleagues across the floor had mentioned, children will need probably more than one set of glasses over the span of many years. Well, that's true, but I think we've got to find out whether children do have those visual impairments, and we need a place to start. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North has provided us with a very sound bill with the amendments that she has proposed to allow us to be able to assist children. We want them to succeed. According to figures gathered by the Alberta

Association of Optometrists, more than 25 per cent of school-age children will have vision problems that limit their potential in all aspects of academic success.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is part of an even better vision for Alberta. This is a vision where Alberta's families and communities are set up for success with the resources and the tools needed now and into the future. Testing the visual health of our children is a very important part of that vision, too. I myself certainly acknowledge the importance of screening for health conditions which can adversely affect educational quality for our students and their overall health. In saying this as part of our mandate, this government has made a commitment to enhancing the health and the well-being of all Albertans. This commitment includes recognizing the important role that vision examination plays in maintaining the health of all Albertans.

This government has recently reinforced its commitment to screening through its dedication to the importance of vision health, where children up to 18 years of age are eligible to receive eye examinations at no extra cost to families. After all, over 80 per cent of a child's learning is visual. That means that from day one children rely heavily on their eyes and vision to read and to write, to connect with their peers, their teachers, and to succeed in the classroom environment. Poor vision health can act as an impediment to the learning process, hindering our children from succeeding and mastering an absolutely critical skill, reading.

Now, there have been various studies drawing on the link between deviant behaviour and illiteracy, as previously mentioned by one of my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, 43 out of 50 states have policies, codes, statutes, regulations, or local school board requirements regarding vision screening and tests. This figure emphasizes the importance of vision in the classroom and the overall academic environment. Even research conducted right here in this province highlights the crucial role that vision plays in a child's learning environment.

For many of us visual ability can be something that we take for granted, but if our visual health was compromised in any way, how we see the world would impact us as well. Our day to day would become more difficult, reading and learning more strenuous. Mr. Speaker, children learning to read for the first time do not report these difficulties more often than not because they do not know that what they are seeing is out of the ordinary and sometimes do not understand the difficulty that they are experiencing. Until a comprehensive eye examination is completed, children may go through their first years of school disliking reading, writing, and overall learning.

Dr. Charles Boulet and Dr. Noella Piquette, working out of the University of Lethbridge, have argued that visual or sensory functioning is very much interconnected with higher cognitive functions such as reading and memory. Further, functional defects of the visual process can impact a number of things, from reading and learning to our other behaviours. Given how essential vision is to learning, it has also been argued that adequate vision management is a matter of fundamental human rights. Again, this connection between visual-perceptual problems, reading, behaviour, and other disabilities makes vision one of the most important areas to target in early testing and assessment.

Mr. Speaker, today's modern classroom also presents added challenges to visual processing. In many classrooms today children no longer have overheads, chalkboards, or even whiteboards to learn from; they have computer screens, iPads, and PowerPoint presentations. That has become the norm as well as digitalized Smart boards replacing familiar whiteboards and modes of instruction, creating more demand on students' visual processing skills.

Ms L. Johnson: How about brown boards?

Ms Fenske: Brown boards? I don't think I had those in my life. Thank you, hon. member.

Within the various domains of visual processing a child's visual health can vary significantly. Mr. Speaker, I know in speaking with the hon. member about some of the issues that people may see preventing children from getting their eye exams if they live in rural areas, which she has had the opportunity to address in speaking with people who provide that service. I'm looking forward to not only having the vision of the students tested but, I guess, the opportunity to have some creative methods of ensuring that that testing occurs throughout the province of Alberta.

I think that Bill 203 is an important step in working to achieve that our children can see and can be successful in school. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate on second reading of Bill 203.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all the members who spoke in second reading debate on Bill 203. There are a few comments and questions that I would like to clarify.

The first is regarding consultation. There has been consultation with a number of groups although as a private member I do not have the resources for extensive consultation. I've consulted with the Alberta College of Optometrists, the Alberta Association of Optometrists, teachers, the Alberta School Boards Association, the CNIB, and others. If Bill 203 passes and the minister responsible decides to proclaim the bill, the department will conduct further consultation to determine what the regulations will be and to develop this policy. I've also received letters from the Alberta College of Optometrists and the Alberta association that suggest amendments to strengthen the bill. Mr. Speaker, I have already committed to take the advice and recommendations of these organizations with whom I have consulted and put them forward as amendments in Committee of the Whole.

4:40

When the bill passes or if the bill passes in second reading, another concern that has been raised is the interpretation of section 2(2), that states that a parent must provide a form, and section 2(5), that states that registration is not complete until this form required is received. This does not mean that a child cannot attend school. A child will be able to attend school, and parents will be reminded and encouraged to have their child's eyes examined. I will clarify these sections in Committee of the Whole so that there cannot be any misinterpretation.

Mr. Speaker, a number of members also raised the concern about costs. I can tell you that we are now paying 10 times the costs for the extra work and efforts required to teach a child suffering from undetected visual impediments. As Dr. Hoang said in the document that I tabled earlier, "If you have a child who is 6 or under, ask them how well they see. You will find that they have a hard time understanding this simple question. This is because they do not know any differently." They do not know. It is up to us to partner with parents to ensure that all children are prepared to learn in school.

The costs for complete eye exams are already in the health care budget, and if a child receives the eye exams through the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program in kindergarten, they also receive eyeglasses free of charge if needed. Cost is not a factor in Bill 203. However, savings is a huge factor. We can save significant

costs to the educational, health, and justice systems simply by implementing Bill 203.

Mr. Speaker, I have tried to address many of the concerns raised in second reading debate. I would like to especially thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who gave a very clear, concise, and logical speech about supporting this bill. I don't say this very often, but I'd like to say it now. The Member for Edmonton-Centre is right. "Kids should have eye exams before they come to school. We can agree on that. That's a fairly straightforward principle, don't you think?"

Mr. Speaker, I wish I had the time to quote from many of my other esteemed colleagues. However, a five-minute closing speech does not allow this. Second reading is to debate the principle of the bill. We all agree on the principle of having eyes checked in preparing a child for school to have the tools they need to learn. Some believe, and I quote Dr. Boulet from the letter I tabled today, that "accepting the status quo is to say that neglect of children is an acceptable standard." The status quo isn't good enough anymore because now we know the difference.

Mr. Speaker, the right thing to do is to support Bill 203. We expect children to be in school for 11 or 12 years, and we do everything possible in the classroom to help them succeed. For 25 per cent of students the path to success includes correcting visual impediments. Vision is complicated, and it is important. It affects everything from health and speech to reading, balance, coordination, and fine motor control. There is nothing in Bill 203 that would prevent a child from gaining access to a quality Alberta education. There is no cost to families for this service, but the cost to children, education, and health care are enormous when children suffer in silence. Passing Bill 203 in second reading is the right thing to do. It is proactive, and it is the only way to ensure that all children are prepared to learn and to read. I ask all my hon. colleagues to support Bill 203 and to support the children of Alberta by doing so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 203 read a second time]

Bill 204
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
(MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver)
Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and talk today about Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014. As colleagues I invite all of you to support this bill. Many, many times I've heard you all stand up and talk about your desire for greater transparency, for greater public input into our government and our society and our province. I've also seen many written articles, whether it's articles with journalists or some of your blogs or some of the papers that you've put out, again, requesting the same kind of thing, asking for a greater opportunity to have openness, to have more transparency, and to have public input into what happens in our great province.

Of course, we've used the phrase "gold standard" in here more than perhaps any other phrase, so I will ask you to support this bill because I believe it does enhance our gold standard. I believe it does go a long distance to improve the engagement of Albertans in our government, the engagement of taxpayers and Albertans in

our public process, and the opportunity for Albertans to be involved.

It starts by allowing MLAs to have four free freedom of information requests per year. The importance of this: I think we may be the most involved watchdogs of public dealings. Certainly, there are lots of other people with vested interests in important things that go on, but for the 87 of us once every four years or thereabouts, we're held totally accountable by some side of 40,000 of our constituents and all 4 million Albertans. We are the most involved watchdogs of public dealings, opposition MLAs and private members of this Legislative Assembly. We're elected to serve. We're elected to hold the government accountable. We're elected to make Alberta better and stronger, and to do that, from time to time we need access to public information.

Of course, with FOIP requests there are fees attached. Sometimes there are very high fees attached to accessing information. My bill is simple. It empowers MLAs to bring about transparency. It empowers us to bring about transparency by giving MLAs four fee waivers per calendar year.

I think it's an area where it may really open up the chance to engage Albertans when we look at some of our low voter turnouts, when we look at how countries like Switzerland have so much more engagement from their citizens, without \$200 fines and those kinds of things. This bill will allow any Albertan and, especially, I hope, it will allow not-for-profits that function so efficiently and so well throughout our province, that do so much work so efficiently for us, to go to any MLA, not just their own but any MLA, to ask them to do the freedom of information request, thereby improving transparency, thereby engaging all Albertans.

When we were first elected in April 2012 – or at least I was – one of the things that really set me back was that after a while it was discovered that we were past our budget in monies that we had been spending on freedom of information requests. We were waiting to hear if some of these were in the public interest, if we were going to get some of these fees back. But the long and the short of it: it was slowing us down in doing the job that we were elected to do. Again, it made me think of the not-for-profits, the many, many hard-working people in our province that do tremendous work for us, and if this is a bottleneck for them, this is a way to really, really help information, public information, become accessible to where it can do the most good, to where Albertans can work with it and make our province better.

MLAs would first request a fee waiver through the current process. If the MLA is turned down, we could invoke the Bill 204 waiver right through the Privacy Commissioner, waiving the fee. The importance of that, of course, is that the Privacy Commissioner would look at the request and could determine to satisfy it if the request was not frivolous, vexatious, or without merit. We would still have the Privacy Commissioner looking at it to ensure that it was in the public interest, in the public good, and that it was on the right track.

4:50

Also, the bill has an addition. For any fee waivers granted pursuant to section 93.1, the name of the Member of the Legislative Assembly who received the fee waiver and the public body involved would also be disclosed, again increasing that gold standard of accountability, that gold standard that we have to deal with every four years when we face our electorate anyway. But this would go a long distance to protect the public, to get the public involved in public information to make our province better. I also believe that this bill would increase our government's willingness to provide information on a proactive basis without

MLAs, without not-for-profits, without Alberta citizens having to chase it down. More information in the provincial sphere, in the public sphere, would be a good thing.

You know, one of the reasons I think this bill is important: some of the freedom of information requests we've done appear to take a year and a half to two years. Some of them have taken up to four to six years, I understand, obviously destroying how pertinent that information is and costing us as Albertans the opportunity to take that information and do something valuable with it, to make us stronger.

It was interesting hearing my colleague from Red Deer-North talk about all the consulting that she did and all the hard work that she had done. Well, I took it upon myself to talk to many, many Albertans, particularly in Cypress-Medicine Hat, and it always amazed me how many of them were surprised to hear that MLAs just couldn't do free freedom of information requests anyway. I believe the federal government only charges \$25 for theirs, so it's almost like being free. There were many, many that were concerned that we couldn't do more than four. A lot suggested 12, once a month. I decided to come up with four to keep it reasonable, to start somewhere. Of course, if this moves through, we'll have the opportunity to make some amendments and discuss this.

But, again, many, many Albertans out there are relishing the opportunity, are looking at this as an opportunity for us as MLAs, accountable every four years, and for them, the 4 million Alberta citizens, to be more engaged in our process. Also, I think that if it's four per year, it'll hold it to a situation where it would be more relevant ones, and it'll be the opportunity for us as MLAs to engage more of our constituents and more of our fellow Albertans.

Colleagues, I've talked to many Albertans, again, particularly in Cypress-Medicine Hat, who relish the idea of this, who were surprised that we couldn't do it anyway, who are asking that their government be more open, be more accountable, make it easier for them to access the information, and for the opportunity to be involved in this great province of ours.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would relinquish the floor, and I would ask all 87 of my colleagues in here to please consider this bill, that will enhance our gold standard.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Associate Minister for Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Scott: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014. I'd like to thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing this bill forward. This will give us an opportunity to discuss the FOIP process in some detail as there seems to be some confusion as to what it entails. Bill 204 proposes to provide every MLA with four free freedom of information, or FOIP, requests every year.

It may be helpful to provide some background for context. The FOIP Act was introduced in the Alberta Legislature in the spring of 1994, following an extensive public consultation process by an all-party panel. The act, which reflected the recommendations of the all-party panel and the input of Albertans, is seen as the cornerstone of an open, accessible, and accountable government for the people of Alberta, and rightfully so. It was proclaimed into force on October 1, 1995, for public bodies such as government departments, agencies, boards, commissions, and other organizations designated in the FOIP regulation.

Extending the act to include local public bodies such as school boards, health authorities, postsecondary educational institutions, and municipalities began with school boards in September 1998. It concluded with local governments, such as municipalities, in October 1999. The act was amended in 1999 in response to a review by a select special committee of the Legislative Assembly. A second review by a select special committee was completed in 2002, and the act was subsequently amended in May 2003.

Section 93 of the act allows that fees may be charged to an applicant. There is a structure as well as limitations for maximum rates that govern how fees are to be charged. There are a large number of factors that go into determining the fees to be charged, including such things as shipping records, supervising the examination of records by the applicant, basic retrieval of records, and so on.

Processing FOIP applications is by no means a cheap task, Mr. Speaker. It is a process that requires time, resources, and manpower. This is a fact that seems to be underappreciated. Given the resources that go into fulfilling FOIP requests, the fees that are charged are very minor in comparison. The FOIP regulation stipulates that there is a \$25 initial fee for one-time requests, a \$50 initial fee for continuing requests, and additional fees when the cost of processing requests for records exceeds \$150. The FOIP regulations already contain a provision to excuse applicants from paying fees where appropriate.

As I do not believe the current FOIP legislation was even reviewed when Bill 204 was drafted, I would like to remind members of the law that is in place. Section 93 of the act:

- 93(1) The head of a public body may require an applicant to pay to the public body fees for services as provided for in the regulations.
- (2) Subsection (1) does not apply to a request for the applicant's own personal information, except for the cost of producing the copy.
- (3) If an applicant is required to pay fees for services under subsection (1), the public body must give the applicant an estimate of the total fee before providing the services.
 - (3.1) An applicant may, in writing, request that the head of a public body excuse the applicant from paying all or part of a fee for services under subsection (1).
- (4) The head of a public body may excuse the applicant from paying all or part of a fee if, in the opinion of the head,
 - (a) the applicant cannot afford the payment or for any other reason it is fair to excuse payment, or
 - (b) the record relates to a matter of public interest, including the environment or public health or safety.
- (4.1) If an applicant has, under subsection (3.1), requested the head of a public body to excuse the applicant from paying all or part of a fee, the head must give written notice of the head's decision to grant or refuse the request to the applicant within 30 days after receiving the request.
- (5) If the head of a public body refuses an applicant's request under subsection (3.1), the notice referred to in subsection (4.1) must state that the applicant may ask for a review under Part 5.
- (6) The fees referred to in subsection (1) must not exceed the actual costs of the services.

As you can see, the ability to waive fees is already in place, and the process is merit-based, as it should be.

We need an answer to the obvious question of why Bill 204's proposal is necessary. We have yet to receive a satisfactory answer. There are a few other questions in addition to this that remain unanswered. For instance, would these free FOIPs be in addition to the ability to apply for fee waivers as outlined in the regulation? Would they be transferable if they were unused? Would they carry over to the next year? Perhaps most importantly,

how would this be monitored and regulated? Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the many glaring contradictions in policy at play in Bill 204, it has also clearly not been carefully thought out if these sorts of questions are still up in the air.

Quite frankly, this is a demonstration that the party opposite has little in the way of practical qualifications for governance. A big part of governance is about helping things to run smoothly. It is about implementing policy that serves the needs of Albertans, not the conveniences of politicians. Those policies need to be crafted in a manner that allows them to be manageable . . .

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. minister, but the time for consideration of this item has expired. You will have time carried over when we revisit this item at the next opportunity.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Traffic Safety Act

504. Mr. Allen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Traffic Safety Act allowing harsher penalties to be imposed on drivers guilty of excessive speeding in order to deter high-risk driving behaviours on Alberta's highways.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present my first motion in this Assembly. It's also with a heavy and hopeful heart that I bring Motion 504 forward and urge my colleagues to support it as it's an issue of great importance to not only the constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo but also to many Albertans in all constituencies.

In just two weeks it marks the second anniversary of a horrific accident on highway 63 that killed seven people. Four occupants of one car, driven by Pastor Shannon Wheaton, were killed when it was struck head-on by another vehicle that passed into their lane, including Pastor Wheaton; his wife, Trena; their two-year-old son; and their pregnant friend, Courtney Penney. Three people in the other vehicle were also killed. The Wheaton's three-year-old son survived, an orphan, as did Ms Penney's husband, Mark. I'm not trying to be ghoulish by invoking their memory; I'm just trying to put a human face on an all-too-common tragedy.

Police believe excessive speed to be a factor in many fatalities. My constituents, many of whom have become inured to traffic fatalities on highway 63, were left reeling in the wake of that dreadful accident, which made headlines across Canada. There was in the weeks that followed a tremendous conversation about traffic safety on the so-called highway of death. I myself was asked by the Premier to prepare a report that would examine necessary approaches to improving traffic safety on highway 63, which was then submitted on June 29, 2012.

To its credit, Mr. Speaker, this government has committed to twinning the portion of highway 63 from Grassland north to Fort McMurray by 2016. In order to complete this project, intended to help address the carnage that is all too common on this highway, the government borrowed in excess of \$600 million for an expedited construction program. Having driven highway 63 as recently as yesterday, I can say that tremendous progress has occurred in the last 12 months. The government has also stepped up enforcement by adding dedicated RCMP and sheriff units on

highway 63 as well as aerial enforcement where that can be used effectively. My constituents and I are grateful.

The public advocacy group Coalition for a Safer 63 and 881 was born from tragedy, and citizens and employers across Wood Buffalo have joined together to develop public awareness campaigns such as the pledge, in which individuals are asked to pledge that they will drive safely to protect themselves and others. But idiot-proofing this highway will not be achieved with the mere addition of additional lanes of traffic in each direction. Greater enforcement, while it appears to have reduced the number of irresponsible speeders and has changed somewhat the culture of the drivers on that highway, also appears insufficient so far as to persuade the worst offenders to slow down, and the pledge is only taken by those for whom personal and public safety is already a priority.

Highway 63 is not the only roadway in Alberta on which traffic fatalities are all too common, Mr. Speaker. It is a distressing and disappointing fact that over 1 in 4 fatal collisions on Alberta highways involve a driver travelling at an unsafe speed. In Edmonton 56 per cent of traffic fatalities involve speeding. This morning alone there was a traffic ticket issued to a driver in Edmonton doing 170 kilometres an hour. When motorists callously and selfishly disregard speed limits, they put innocent people at risk in addition to themselves.

Our traffic codes, no less than our criminal justice system, rely on the basic principles of retribution and deterrence. When someone has ignored the rules of the road and is caught by a police officer or sheriff, they're ticketed. If the offence is sufficiently serious, the driver must also appear before a judge to face the possibility of further punishment. But it strikes me, Mr. Speaker, that there is a compromising inequity between our existing fine structure and the offences for which those fines are imposed.

For example, running a red light will earn a driver a \$287 fine and three demerit points. In fact, a rolling stop at a stop sign, which would involve speeds below 10 kilometres an hour, will earn a driver the same fine. Driving 50 kilometres above the posted speed limit will earn a driver a \$351 fine and six demerits, an increase of less than \$70. For every 10 kilometres a driver exceeds the speed limit, simple physics demonstrate that this driver ensures any resulting collision will have 10 times the force, greatly increasing the likelihood of serious injury or death.

Mr. Speaker, let me give the members assembled some statistics to illustrate the gravity of the problem of excessive speeding. In 2010 20.6 per cent of drivers in fatal collisions and 23 per cent of those in injury collisions on highway 63 were travelling at excessive speeds. One enforcement blitz weekend, May 3 to 6 of last year, officers issued 552 speeding tickets between Redwater and Fort McMurray, 95 of which were for hazardous driving, including excessive speed. One ticket was issued to the driver of a vehicle that clocked at 228 kilometres per hour.

This is not simply a problem in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 27.4 per cent of drivers in fatal collisions across Alberta were travelling at excessive speeds. In other words, though there are proportionally more fatalities on highway 63 than other Alberta highways, excessive speed is actually at fault more often on highways 2, 3, 16, 22, 43; you name it. Speed kills. Though I do not have quantifiable data to demonstrate the point I'm about to make, there is far too much anecdotal evidence to indicate that those drivers most likely to use excessive speed on Alberta's highways are not deterred by our present traffic code, existing fines, or demerit points.

Fines levied have not kept up with inflation. The cost of changing the oil in your car has gone up with inflation while the

cost of burning rubber on your car has stayed flat. Too often it is said of and by excessive speeders on highway 63 that a fine equivalent to four hours' wages, where there's no guarantee they'll be caught, is woefully inadequate. It's play money, as easily dumped behind the wheel of a speeding car as it is in a run of bad luck amusing oneself at the blackjack table, except that occasional blackjack players do not gamble with other people's lives. In short, \$351 is not enough to make chronic offenders bat an eye.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to increase the penalties for driving at unsafe speeds on all Alberta roadways and highways. It is time to adopt measures that are sufficiently heavy to act as a deterrent. Critics of this initiative will argue that drivers who exceed the speed limit by 50 kilometres or more are already liable for additional penalty since the offence includes a mandatory appearance before a judge; however, these penalties are left to the discretion of the judiciary and in some cases are based on the average income of all Albertans, which may not apply, for example, to excessive speeders in my constituency, which has the highest average wages in the country. Regardless, considering the tremendous danger to public safety that excessive speeding creates, higher base penalties are appropriate in and of themselves.

Three provinces – British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec – have recently imposed much stiffer penalties for excessive speeding, including the threat of seizure or suspension. Ontario, for example, imposes fines nearly 40 per cent higher. In Quebec fines are as much as three times the norm in Alberta. All three jurisdictions have a registry system to increase fines for repeat offenders.

The Alberta Association of Police Governance also passed a resolution in 2013 calling on the province to increase the penalties for excessive speeding. Let me be clear, however. Knowing that members of this Assembly have already conducted their own research that will have identified the full range of penalties requested by the Alberta Association of Police Governance and imposed by B.C., Ontario, and Quebec, I am not in this initiative advocating for seizure or immediate suspension. I am advocating for stiffer penalties for excessive speeding and dangerous driving to be imposed by the judiciary during the mandatory court appearance required for any driver travelling at speeds 50 kilometres above the posted speed limit.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Solicitor General said that he wanted to review the data from jurisdictions that have imposed stiffer penalties before introducing the same here in Alberta. Now is the time. The data is available. The prevailing will of Albertans is behind this initiative.

5:10

I've conducted a public consultation in my constituency, both in 2012 and recently, to assess the opinion of the public towards stiffer penalties for excessive speeding. The response I have received from the citizens of Wood Buffalo and Albertans across this great province has not been . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The speaking order will be the hon. Minister of Justice, followed by Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 504, urging the government to introduce amendments to the Traffic Safety Act, allowing harsher

penalties to be imposed on drivers found guilty of excessive speeding in order to deter high-risk driving behaviours on Alberta's highways. I wanted to thank the member for his comments and for bringing this motion forward. Traffic safety is something this government does take very seriously. It's something that was engrained in me as a kid, when my dad worked in the insurance business.

This member will recall that last year we funded 16 new officers for integrated traffic units that patrol highway 63. I've driven that highway before, and it can be a very dangerous highway, frankly, as can highway 2, that I drive often, between Calgary and Edmonton. This year as well we're providing resources to hire 40 new RCMP officers to be deployed across the province, and of course a lot of their work will involve traffic.

Just as enforcement is one piece of safe highway travel, so too is driver behaviour, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 the Wood Buffalo and Boyle-Redwater integrated traffic unit issued about 24,000 traffic charges. Of those, about 15,000 charges were issued along highway 63, showing again that driver behaviour on that particular roadway is a problem.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the penalty for speeding 40 kilometres over the limit is \$273 and four demerit points. Of course, if you get 15 demerit points within the course of two years, you will lose your licence for 30 days. The penalty increases to \$351 and six points if you're speeding 50 kilometres over the limit. What's most important there is that the existing law requires that if you're speeding 50 kilometres over the limit, you get a mandatory court appearance, which can involve an additional sanction as well. If a police officer believes that the driver was engaged in a race or was driving for a bet or a wager, the vehicle may be seized immediately by the police regardless of the speed. Law enforcement in Alberta can apply penalties under the Criminal Code of Canada as well. For example, a conviction for operating a vehicle that is dangerous to the public can result in a five-year prison term.

Now, there was some talk about vehicle seizures over the last year, Mr. Speaker. We provide many tools for law enforcement to crack down on serious offenders in traffic safety. One tool that other provinces use is that they impound vehicles for excessive speeds. For example, in B.C. if you're going more than 40 kilometres over the limit, your vehicle will be impounded immediately by the officer. Now, I personally believe that without clear evidence that this has enhanced road safety, vehicle impoundment is a measure that goes too far. I believe in evidence-based legislation like how our drunk-driving law was based on evidence that it would reduce fatalities, and it actually has. But in this particular case I would add that in serious infractions, where racing is involved, the vehicle could already be seized. I don't think that we should be seizing vehicles for just being 40 kilometres over the limit because that hasn't been shown one way or the other to bring the speeds down.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one thing to consider is that our justice system is currently under considerable strain, largely because of the number of people that keep moving to this province. It is conducting a number of initiatives to manage serious systemic overload and consequent delays. One key cause of delay is the resource drain associated with the prosecution of a high volume of relatively low-severity offences such as speeding. These offences already consume a disproportionate amount of scarce judicial, prosecutorial, and enforcement resources. Increasing penalties associated with speeding would likely increase the number of trials to be heard and further exacerbate current systemic issues. However, I am pleased that we are making progress on how many of these issues are dealt with thanks to the hard work of many

people in my department, particularly Mr. Greg Lepp, Alberta's chief Crown prosecutor.

We're also looking at making reforms to traffic court. Despite criticism from some criminal defence lawyers we will continue to make traffic court more accessible for Albertans, with the overall goal of enhancing their access to justice. Despite the fearmongering from some members that I just heard from here, Albertans will continue to be able to fight a traffic ticket before a court of law.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I strongly support that the spirit of this motion is to deter high-risk driving behaviours. There are numerous tools that can be used to achieve this. Some I agree with, and some, I believe, would require more evidence before convincing me of their effectiveness such as automatic vehicle seizures. I do note that other provinces have fines for excessive speeding that exceed \$1,000, but I also believe that we could look at going in the direction of higher fines. That is something that I think our departments, between myself and the Minister of Transportation, could examine. It has been many years since the dollar values of traffic fines have been adjusted.

I wanted to thank the member for bringing up this important topic, and I will be supporting it because I do think that this is something that we need to continually look at in Alberta. We do have some very fast roadways here, Mr. Speaker. Highway 63, that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned, is one of them, but we also have to take a panprovincial perspective on what actually is going to improve road safety. Cars aren't going away any time soon. We have to make sure that things are safer for people who drive vehicles, for people who are passengers, and, of course, for pedestrians.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, everyone. I, too, would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this interesting topic forward for discussion. It's an interesting discussion once you think about some of the little intricacies that there are. I'd also like to thank the Solicitor General for his comments as well. I think they're well worth noting.

As we know, this essentially calls for an increase in the penalties imposed on drivers caught doing 50 kilometres or more over the limit. It basically encourages the government, therefore, to introduce amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to allow for harsher penalties. While I have reservations about these changes to some degree, I certainly would look at these amendments, should this motion be approved, with some interest because it certainly is a complicated topic.

Just to quickly review – and I think the other speakers have said this very clearly – the current rules in the Traffic Safety Act and in the use of highway and rules of the road regulation and in the Provincial Offences Procedure Act and in the procedures regulation provide that where a speeding ticket is issued in accordance with the table of values, they can fine for these types of things up to a maximum of \$306, as was mentioned. These types of offences can also give six demerits for that kind of situation as well.

Further, as was mentioned, too, where they do exceed the speed limit by more than 50 kilometres an hour, the person is already required to appear before a justice without the alternative of making a voluntary payment. There are certainly some rules in place that, one would think, would be adequate. Unfortunately, from the figures that were just mentioned in the House by the

other speakers, the public seems to definitely be at risk. Currently the fines, obviously, therefore seem not to be significant enough for some. Despite the fact that 50 kilometres over the limit means a six-demerit penalty and that later on 15 demerits means a licence suspension, it obviously doesn't seem to be doing the job that we hoped it would.

However, this motion as it is seems a little bit vague to me. It talks about things in generalities, and it does not necessarily talk about some of the things, as was mentioned by the other speakers as well, in terms of vehicle seizures and so on. I do understand that that was left out for a reason, and I think it may be prudent to look at that for a moment because the immediate seizure of vehicles and the impoundment would mean quite an administrative cost to the province and to the public and tie up police and towing and impound resources and so on.

Despite those observations and the reservations I have, it does target only the most careless and dangerous speeders, and I think that's an appropriate thing. With the automatic court appearance, this could allow judges to actually deliver stiffer penalties, which may be worth while to consider. If that is imposed in the amendments that might come forward, they would be something I would be keen to review at that time. You know, there would be discretion for the government over what those sanctions would be in the regulations coming up, I would think.

This seems to be where Albertans are paying a toll to speed these days, and the penalty doesn't seem to be a good enough deterrent. Taking all this into account, I therefore support the motion, and I look forward to the possible amendments as a result if this motion passes.

Thank you very much.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Foothills, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 504, regarding higher fines for speeders. I just want to take a moment here to thank the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for bringing this motion forward and for all the work that he's done to bring attention to the dangers of highway 63 and especially to speeding on Alberta's highways.

Now, having said that, I'd like to go through specifically and just talk about a few points, Mr. Speaker. You know, I may add that I am with the member a hundred per cent in spirit behind this bill. I have a few questions for him, but I'm definitely leaning toward making Alberta highways safer.

One of the challenges, Mr. Speaker, is, first of all, that I'm not sure if speeding fines and increasing fines are a deterrent for those that are the most dangerous on Alberta highways and those that are in a rush to get to where they're going. I think, you know, that for folks who are speeding, especially when we look at, again, many of the ladies and gentlemen who work up in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region, I'm not sure if increasing a fine by a couple of hundred dollars is going to be an effective deterrent.

I do want to reference that back in 2010 British Columbia brought in legislation that allowed police to seize vehicles from people caught driving more than 40 kilometres an hour over the posted speed limit. Now, I am going to talk about this, and I'm not necessarily in favour of immediate vehicle seizure because that skips the process of due process. I believe that every Albertan is entitled to that, you know, to innocence before guilt.

However, what's interesting about B.C.'s legislation is that within one year the number of fatality- and injury-related crashes in the province was cut in half. You know, the Solicitor General asked for proof. Well, reducing the number of fatalities and injuries from excessive speeding and the fact that B.C. did it and reduced their numbers by 50 per cent after introducing this legislation shows that maybe we don't have the appropriate deterrents in the province at the moment for cutting back some of our reckless or heavy-footed Albertans.

Having said that, I do want to qualify that obviously this isn't every Albertan and that obviously there are many that tend to drive safely, but it seems that the only way to stop people from speeding is to take them off the road completely. Now, while seizing a vehicle or taking away a licence is one way to do it – you can't speed if you can't drive – it's also important that we advocate for mass transportation means, alternative means, whether that's carpools, trains, HOV lanes, et cetera, which is a way to take excessive speeders off the road.

I just want to cite – and I recognize my time is short – that the state of Georgia had the Super Speeder Law, and it's the best comparison, from what I've found, to this current motion. Under this particular law anyone caught speeding at 75 miles an hour or over on a two-lane road where 55 miles per hour is the typical posted rate – so we're talking 20 miles per hour or more – is subject to an additional \$200 fine on top of the general fines for speeding. Now, the fees collected under the Super Speeder Law are intended to be used to help Georgia's trauma care hospital system, where approximately 60 per cent of all trauma care patients are crash related, which is a surprisingly high number, Mr. Speaker. Similar proposals have been mentioned for fines collected within our province.

Now, impressively, since the Super Speeder Law went into effect, Georgia has racked up nearly 23,000 Super Speeder cases and more than \$34 million. However, as advertised, the law has not had the intended consequence or the intended effect of reducing speed on state highways though the upside is that it's become, you know, a lucrative source of income and, again, income that is going toward funding the hospital. The root cause or the purpose behind this law is not achieving the results that they had hoped.

State troopers have said: "Society doesn't slow down. Society is always in a hurry. As a matter of fact, when we stop a lot of people, the common response is: 'Can you go ahead and write my ticket and . . . get me on my way? I was late for something.'" I mean, this U.S. law seems like a good example of the effects that the proposed motion would create, but as we see, fines alone aren't necessarily going to make people drive better or slower. Again, the proposed legislation would only give out a fine, without the added benefit of giving the power of a potential seizure like in B.C. and Ontario.

Now, I want to give one of my suggestions or proposals, because I, too, don't believe in immediate vehicle seizure. I mean, there could be challenges with the photoradar gun if it wasn't calibrated properly, et cetera. But I think one way to meet in the middle is looking at, you know, vehicle seizure upon conviction, still going through the proper steps but for drivers to know that if they are speeding excessively, they will in fact have a consequence or a penalty stronger than just a monetary fine, that they will lose their vehicle.

Let's see here. I'm sure I'm running short of time. You know, again, one of the ideas or suggestions that comes out often is looking at driver education or increasing that. Sometimes it doesn't matter how much education we give folks; it's not going

to change their driving habits or their driving behaviour. I think educational programs will put a dent in the problem of speeding. When we look at examples of, say, either smoking and drinking or drinking and driving, education still has had mixed results.

As well, there are others that have put forward the idea of increasing the posted rates of speed. I don't think that's an effective way. The tendency would be that if people get an extra 20 kilometres an hour to buffer, then they'll just take another 20 on top of that if they are speeding excessively.

One question would be, again, potentially looking at photoradar. I believe that when the Minister of Infrastructure was Minister of Transportation, he said that he'd be open to using photoradar on 63 but not any other rural highway. It's interesting that it's okay for one highway but not others. Now, again, this may be one deterrent. Maybe at the end of the day the approach is a multifaceted way of trying to head this off.

I will support this motion because I do believe it's a step in the right direction. I think that we do need to acknowledge that monetary fines aren't necessarily a strong deterrent for drivers, and there are, you know, lots of examples of this.

I will ask a couple of questions, if I can find them, and read them into *Hansard*. Of course, at the moment I can't find them, but one of them was to look at ways that we can deter speeding other than just increasing fines: looking at HOV lanes; looking at improving mass transit, rapid transit; looking at possibly rail. Again, upon conviction, would seizure of a vehicle, loss of a vehicle for a certain period of time also be a deterrent for those speeding down the road?

I will say that I have spoken with families who have lost family members on highway 63 primarily due to speeding. I know that they've been pushing and have done incredible advocacy work to have all MLAs in this House address the fact of how dangerous 63 is. But I do appreciate that we do have other highways that are dangerous as well.

I want to thank the member for this motion. I will be supporting this, but I would like to look at other ways to deter excessive speeding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we have 25 minutes left, and I have quite a list of speakers. The next three speakers in order will be the Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be short. I do stand in favour of Motion 504, put forward by my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and I thank you, hon. member, for bringing this to the attention of the Assembly. Almost every year we hear of horrible death and injury accidents that occur on Alberta's highways. I see many of these in my travels back and forth from here in Edmonton to my constituency in Calgary. Police believe excessive speed to have been the major factor in many of these accidents.

The QE II corridor between Calgary and Edmonton is a very busy one, as you know, Mr. Speaker, and it is a key economic route for this province. As I drove back to Calgary just last week, while the snow, of course, has melted, I saw on the shoulders of the highway debris strewn throughout, on the sides of the highway and into the ditches, and that has occurred from all the various accidents over the winter months. As we all know, excessive speed seems to have played an important role in most of these cases. As this highway is twinned and has fencing between the

north and south roads, the issue most responsible is excessive speed for the road conditions or dangerous driving habits.

Highway 63 is not the only roadway in Alberta on which traffic fatalities are all too common. We see it all over the province, Mr. Speaker. It is a fact that over 1 in 4 fatal collisions on Alberta highways involve a driver travelling at an unsafe speed. When motorists callously and selfishly disregard speed limits, they put innocent people at risk in addition to themselves. I ask myself: is where they are going more important than the lives of the other drivers on the road?

Already when someone has ignored the rules of the road and is caught, they are ticketed, of course. If the offence is viewed as more serious by the enforcement officer, the driver must appear before the courts to face the possibility of further punishment, but it appears that the fines are just not harsh enough. In 2012, Mr. Speaker, 27.4 per cent of drivers in fatal collisions across Alberta were travelling at an excessive speed. Clearly, the fine is just not enough of a deterrent. This \$350 fine is just not enough to make chronic offenders bat an eye.

Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. It is time for this government to increase the penalties for driving at unsafe speeds on all Alberta highways and roadways. It is time to adopt measures that are sufficiently heavy to act as a deterrent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise and speak to Motion 504 from the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I learned quite a bit from reading the briefings on this well-researched motion. I'll just summarize a few for the record.

This motion would preserve the assumption of innocence until the individuals get their day in court. It does nothing about subverting that issue.

Statistics show that as of 2010 between 21 and 24 per cent of drivers in injury collisions were travelling at an unsafe speed. That's a very substantial proportion of injuries caused by speed or at least contributed to by speed. Between January 2013 and January 2014 11,000 tickets were issued by police just in the Wood Buffalo area, 10,000 of them for speeding. About 90 per cent of the tickets handed out were for speeding in that area, 228 of those in excess of 50 kilometres an hour over the speed limit, with speeds as high as 228 kilometres an hour.

The Alberta Association of Police Governance passed a motion in 2013 calling on the government to "enhance deterrent measures for excessive speeding within the Traffic Safety Act." It's interesting to note that Ontario is taking this to another level in terms of their fines, which range between \$2,000 and \$10,000, compared to our \$350, in addition to a licence suspension, a seven-day vehicle seizure, six demerit points, up to six months in jail, and up to two years of licence suspension for a first conviction for speeding in excess of 50 kilometres over the speed limit.

The purpose, as indicated, of Motion 504 is to "urge the government to introduce amendments to the Traffic Safety Act allowing harsher penalties to be imposed on drivers [caught speeding excessively] to deter high-risk driving behaviours on Alberta's highways." It seems eminently reasonable to me that if individuals do not understand the risk they're putting themselves

and others at, there should be a much higher fine than \$350 and a few demerit points, commensurate with this government's response to driving under the influence, where they dropped the level of acceptable alcohol from .08 to .05. I think the significance of speeding, especially speeding over 50 kilometres higher than the speed limit, warrants that kind of serious attention and serious penalties.

There was a story once circulating on the Internet that the best deterrent is a six-inch spike sticking out of the steering column. In some respects, I understand that. If there was a spike sticking out at drivers, they would tend to drive slower speeds. If our own fear, in other words, was in our consciousness with respect to the damage of injuries, most of us would drive differently. Unfortunately, we need to be reminded of that in many different ways. One is through the pocketbook, and another is through restricting the use of the vehicle with licence removal. I personally think that this is just one step towards what our future societal demands will be for the kind of destruction that speeders are creating in our society, not only human suffering and death and disability but tremendous costs to a health care system whose costs are already burgeoning out of control.

I have no hesitation in supporting this fairly conservative, I would call it, decision on penalizing these high speeders. I would even entertain some of the other measures that Ontario is bringing to bear, notwithstanding that what is really needed is a stronger educational process among schoolchildren and adolescents around risk-taking and the recognition, I guess, in more concrete ways of the kinds of responsibilities that young people and all of us are taking on when we get behind the wheel of a car or any vehicle, the responsibilities we take on not only for ourselves but for everyone in society.

This is a very short-term, front-end penalty that's being promoted. There are a number of different issues that relate to prevention and behaviour change that I think we should also be considering, that the Transportation ministry should be considering. I don't know what currently is happening within the administration, but we need to look at all manner of prevention in our society, and this is one other area that I think is deficient in our investment in prevention programs and prevention behaviour, the state-of-the-art prevention behaviour challenges.

I'll be supporting this motion, and I thank the member for bringing it forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

5:40

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 504, proposed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Motion 504 calls on the government to amend the Traffic Safety Act in order to deter excessive speeding on our roadways. It aims to do this by calling for harsher penalties to be levied on drivers who are guilty of excessive speeding. As Minister of Transportation I can tell this Assembly that I take traffic safety very seriously. Even one fatality is one too many, in my mind, and I'm pleased to be able to contribute to this important debate today.

Mr. Speaker, 2011 was the Year of Road Safety in Canada, where a number of initiatives were introduced to improve road safety. One such effort was the development of the road safety strategy 2015. The strategy was developed by the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators in consultation with various government members, law enforcement, engineers, and other key stakeholders from across Canada. The main purpose of

the strategy is to achieve an overall yearly downward trend in fatalities and serious injuries caused by vehicle collisions.

The strategy involves enhancing enforcement measures, raising public awareness, and promoting a commitment to road safety by focusing on the areas of greatest concern, which include drinking and driving, excessive speeding, and non-use of seatbelts. Recent indications suggest that we are making significant progress, with fatalities 6 per cent lower than the baseline and serious injuries 15 per cent lower nationally.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian road safety strategy has identified speed and aggressive driving as the leading contributing factors to motor vehicle collisions. That is why the Alberta Traffic Safety Act contains significant penalties for excessive speeding. We have substantial fines and demerit points in place as consequences, which increase in severity along with speed. For example, speeding over 50 kilometres per hour above the posted speed limit will currently result in a mandatory court appearance, and if you're convicted, the court will determine the fine, and six demerit points will be recorded against the operator's licence.

There are also programs in place for drivers who repeatedly commit serious offences or begin to show a pattern of driving violations and collisions. They include mandatory retesting and appearances before the Alberta Transportation Safety Board.

Specific to enforcement, the Alberta traffic safety plan recommends implementing integrated enforcement strategies to target high-risk locations and target offenders by using enhanced data collection to develop enforcement plans specific to high-collision areas. The traffic safety plan takes a safer system approach, encouraging a better understanding of how the three elements of our road system – drivers, vehicles, and the roadways themselves – interact. The co-ordination of public education and activities in tandem with enforcement programs and roads that are designed, engineered, maintained, and operated for safety help to make us all safer on the road.

Mr. Speaker, the net result of these traffic safety initiatives here in Alberta is a 25 per cent reduction in traffic fatalities since 2007. Further to that, serious injuries have decreased by 26 per cent, intersection-related fatalities have decreased by 24 per cent, alcohol-related fatalities have decreased by 39 per cent, and speed-related fatalities have decreased by 16 per cent, all of this despite a significant increase in the number of drivers and vehicles on our roadways during that time. To me, this proves that our strategies are having a positive effect on road safety in our province, but we can always do more.

My department is currently conducting a comprehensive review of the Traffic Safety Act. Part of this review includes continuing to conduct research with respect to excessive speeding and other high-risk driving behaviours. Phase 3 of the review will include substantive policy amendments to the entire act and public consultation on those proposed amendments. Mr. Speaker, we would consider an amendment to increase the penalty to excessive high-risk speeders to be a substantial policy amendment. We know that excessive speeding is one of a number of high-risk driving behaviours that puts the public at risk, including non-use of seatbelts, impaired driving, and running red lights and stop signs. All of these high-risk behaviours should be considered under phase 3 of our Traffic Safety Act review, and as such I can commit today that we'll do just that.

Mr. Speaker, as MLAs we can certainly appreciate how much we all depend on our vehicles and our vast network of roads. Last year alone I drove hundreds of kilometres all over this great province, and one thing remains constant: road safety is dependent on all Albertans taking the time to slow down. We as Albertans are the cure to making Alberta's roads safer for all who use them.

I want to thank the hon. member for his commitment to traffic safety. This is an important debate, and I look forward to hearing from the rest of my hon. colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the hon. Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of Motion 504, proposed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Motion 504 calls on the government to amend the Traffic Safety Act in order to curb excessive speeding on our roadways. The overall intention is to deter high-risk drivers on Alberta's roadways and to improve upon general road-user behaviour. Given the occurrence of speed-related traffic incidents on highways this motion seeks to give law enforcement another tool to ensure that Alberta roads are safe for all those who use them. Simply consider the challenges posed by highway 63 to and from Fort McMurray. This is something that the person who has proposed the motion, my colleague, and I know first-hand.

Excessive speeding carries with it various interpretations in many different jurisdictions. In British Columbia excessive speeding is outlined in section 148 of the Motor Vehicle Act and is defined as driving at a speed greater than 40 kilometres per hour over the posted speed limit. A person who drives a motor vehicle on a highway at a speed greater than 40 kilometres per hour over the posted speed limit commits an offence and is liable to conviction. The B.C. Motor Vehicle Act outlines the fines as follows. Exceeding the driving limit by more than 40 kilometres per hour is a fine of \$368 plus the penalty of three demerit points on his or her driving record. Exceeding the driving limit by more than 60 kilometres per hour is a fine of \$483 plus the penalty of three demerit points on his or her driving record.

Additionally, excessive speeding of this nature will result in the immediate impoundment of the user's vehicle along with the following costs: seven days for a first offence plus towing and storage costs in the amount of \$210, 30 days for a second offence within a two-year period plus towing and storage costs of approximately \$700, and 60 days for any subsequent offences within two years plus towing and storage costs of over \$1,200. B.C. has stated that speed is one of the leading causes of death on its roads. Accordingly, their legislation and regulations reflect the government's level of concern for ensuring roads remain safe for all who use them.

Mr. Speaker, in Quebec the Highway Safety Code stipulates that excessive speeding is travelling at 40 kilometres per hour or more over the speed limit in a zone of 60 kilometres per hour or less, 50 kilometres per hour or more over the speed limit in a zone of 60 kilometres per hour but not more than 90 kilometres per hour, and 60 kilometres per hour or more over the speed limit in a zone of 100 kilometres per hour or more. A peace officer shall immediately suspend for a period of seven days the licence of any person who commits an offence in accordance with the traffic safety code. The suspension period is increased from seven to 30 days when a user commits a repeat offence within a 10-year period. This suspension can also be increased to as much as 60 days if the user is convicted of more than one speeding offence. The fines for excessive speeding in Quebec begin at \$541 and can increase to as much as \$1,277. Demerit points are also given and start at six, ranging to 14, for excessively exceeding the speed limit in Quebec.

Comparatively, Alberta's Traffic Safety Act contains penalties for excessive speeding such as substantial fines and demerit points which increase with the speed of the vehicle. Mr. Speaker, for example, speeding over 50 kilometres per hour above the posted speed limit will currently result in a mandatory court appearance. If convicted, the court will determine the fine and six demerit points will be recorded against the operator's licence. This sentence is three points more severe than the starting-point demerit system practices in B.C. for excessive speeding and is at par with practices in Quebec.

5:50

Increased deterrence for excessive speeding has been a goal of police services throughout our province for many years. I share that goal. The safety of all Albertans on highways and roads is important to all families and communities, and our government sees this as an important initiative. As a part of the government's capital plan investment Budget 2014 provides \$5 billion for the provincial highway network, including road rehabilitation and the twinning of highway 63, so that Albertans have the safest roads to drive on.

I believe it is prudent to revisit the amounts violators can be fined. There are other measures that can be examined, but these are alternatives that we ought to be considering carefully as we decide whether to pursue the course of action that Motion 504 is urging. We would need to be very clear as to how these harsher penalties would be determined and administered, consulting not only with stakeholders but also with the public. Regardless of how such amendments to the current legislation would be carried out in practice, I am nevertheless sure that all hon. members in this House would agree that traffic safety should be a continuing priority moving forward as our population increases and, with it, the traffic on our roads.

I congratulate the hon. member's commitment to traffic safety as demonstrated by his sponsorship of this motion, and I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate. I support this motion and its intent to make our roads safer.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. We have approximately three minutes if anyone else would like to speak to this motion.

If not, then I would ask the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to close debate. You have five minutes.

Mr. Allen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd particularly like to thank all of the members of this Assembly from all caucuses that spoke to Motion 504. As I mentioned before, the responses that I received from the citizens of Wood Buffalo and Albertans across this great province – I mean, I did a significant amount of consultation during the highway 63 report in 2012, and a great deal came across in social media. We did a telephone town hall. That's all posted online as well. You don't have to FOIP that, members.

There are some that feel quite passionately that they should be able to speed as much as they want under certain circumstances – say, passing a vehicle or whatever – but collectively the response of ordinary Albertans has been in favour of stiffer penalties. We

had a number of comments as well that ranged from having vehicle crushers on the side of the road or public floggings, so certainly we're not advocating for any of that. But, by and large, Albertans have no tolerance for excessive speeders, who put the lives of others at risk in addition to their own.

Mr. Speaker, I said often when I was preparing the report that it was not just to twin highway 63, but it was to come across with a plan, and that's why the plan was called Towards a Safer 63. That plan was multifaceted as well. I said at the time that I'd be damned if I'd have any involvement in a project that was going to build a four-lane speedway because as we all know as well, all you're doing is opening that up to additional collisions. Fatalities or not, it puts higher costs and higher pressure on our emergency services. On highway 63 that's a particularly strong issue because there are 200 kilometres of nothing from Fort McMurray all the way to Wandering River. In fact, the number of collisions that were occurring caused one of our volunteer fire departments a great deal of stress, so they no longer respond to motor vehicle collisions on highway 63.

Albertans want to see these penalties increased. Albertans want their roads and highways to be safer for themselves, their friends, and their families.

I thank again all the members that spoke, in particular the Minister of Transportation, from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, for some of your comments and your commitment towards making all Alberta highways safer. As you mentioned, the plan that you've been putting forward with your department is having a noticeable effect. It is having results, and we see those results. But as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned, we do need to look at a multifaceted approach, one that includes increased levels of enforcement, the advertising and marketing that you spoke of in estimates, but, I believe as well, significant fines. In Ontario alone they showed, when they put advertising out, that with their new plan of vehicle seizure and \$10,000 fines, there was a significant drop in speeding on highway 401.

The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General indicated that there were challenges around the judicial resources. I would argue that making the fines significant will in fact relieve some of the pressure on our judicial resources.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank all members for speaking to this, and I urge you all to support this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, were you trying to get my attention?

Mr. Campbell: Yeah. Well, we'll call it a night, Mr. Speaker, and we'll adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: The legislative policy committee on Alberta's Economic Future will convene at 7 p.m. in committee room A for consideration of the main estimates of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

Issue 18

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Dear Lord, guide us to a place of worship when lives are lost, especially when they are lost through tragedy, and hear us in our prayers for those whose youthful lives were taken in Calgary. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has an introduction of a visitor, which will be done by the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young man who captured our imaginations a couple of months ago because of his exploits at the Sochi Winter Olympic Games not so much because of what he did but because of what he didn't do, and that is that he didn't skate in the 1,000 metres in speed skating. He gave his spot over to Denny Morrison, and because of that sportsmanship gesture Denny Morrison was able to compete and win the silver medal. I'm talking, of course, about Calgary's own Gilmore Junio.

Mr. Speaker, Gilmore is visiting us today. He had an opportunity to meet the Premier, and we had a discussion about a number of things. I'm very proud to be able to say that Gilmore has come up through the Alberta sport development system. In fact, I was coaching at the very first speed skating meet, 11 years ago, that Gilmore competed in. I wasn't coaching Gilmore. I was coaching my son, and I was hoping against Gilmore. I must say, though, that even at that point I recognized that he was skinny and awkward, but he got better. I will tell you now that he is one of the top speed skaters not just in Alberta and Canada but in the world. This year he skated the fifth-fastest 500-metre time ever skated by a men's speed skater. He has won gold, silver, and bronze medals this year representing Canada in World Cup events. His time of 34:25 is a mere 22 one-hundredths of a second over the long-standing world record held by another Albertan and another Canadian, Jeremy Wotherspoon.

Gilmore, as I said, came up through the Alberta sports system. He was the 2010 recipient of the athlete of the year, and I'm so pleased that he's able to join us today. Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, please welcome Gilmore Junio.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll begin with school groups, and then we'll go on with other special visitors.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 23 wonderful students and visitors from Belmead school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Neelam Boora, and Miss Frances Leard. When I asked them how I should describe them,

they used the words "creative, unique, extraordinary, inspiring, well informed, and amazingly difficult." In fact, they even used the word "fabulous" right here in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. There's a future MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark in that group.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome a wonderful group of students from Holy Spirit Catholic school in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. There are 45 bright grade 6 students that are here with us along with their teachers, Ms Laura Joyce and Mrs. Mandy Jensen, and also parent helpers. I'm so thrilled to have them here. I know there are several of them that will be great leaders in our province. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 29 students from Our Lady of Victories school. They're here with their teacher, Tannis Williams, and parents Shelley Smith, Lana Tensen, and Donna Van Horn. I can tell you that I had an opportunity to speak with these students, and they had some tough questions. They're looking forward to question period today.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, we're going to proceed with the introduction of other guests. Let us go on with a number of guests who are here for the special Vaisakhi celebration. Please let's make these as quick as we can, starting with the hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of introductions, the first of which is that we've effectively got three generations of the Bhullar family here in the Alberta Legislature today. I'm very pleased and very proud to introduce my grandfather Jogir Singh Bhullar; my grandmother Mohinder Kaur Bhullar; my father, Baljinder Singh Bhullar; and my mom, Sukhvir Kaur Bhullar. I would ask them to rise. When my grandparents are around, I suddenly lose words. I guess I will have to behave today. My grandmother actually watches me in question period quite often. Some days I'm glad she doesn't have the best command of the English language, but she can tell when I'm in trouble.

I'm going to move on, Mr. Speaker, to other members of the community from Calgary that have joined us here for the Vaisakhi celebrations: my aunt Hardish Kaur Sekhon; my uncle Darshan Singh Bhullar and his daughter, who is here all the way from India; as well, Mr. Mohinder Singh; Mr. Gurdial Singh Khehra; Mrs. Kaur; Sewa Singh Premi; Mohan Singh Sidhu; Mr. Jangbahadur Singh Sidhu; Gurdarsha Sidhu; Jaswinder Sidhu – they're not all related – Inderjit Rana; Naib Singh Sandhu; and Atkar Singh Sanghara. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you. I have three introductions to do today if you'll allow me. My colleagues from Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-Mill Woods will be introducing the rest of the guests. It's my great honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly as my first introduction my wife, Kamal Sandhu. She's been my life partner for the last 30 years. She has been a pillar through good times and bad times. She is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask my lovely wife to rise.

1:40

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to this Assembly is our special guests Mr. Sony Ahluwalia, Crown prosecutor; his lovely daughter – she's sitting in the members' gallery – and his mother, Auntie Ahluwalia.

From the Gurdwara Nanaksar executive committee we've got Mr. Zora Grewal, Mr. Jagdev Dhillon, and Mr. Lotay; from Siri Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara, executive committee are members Mr. Randawa and Jagdish Rai; and from the Sikh Federation of Edmonton are executive members Kulmit Sangha, Sunny Sangha, and Karnail Deol, past president. I would ask all of these guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

My last introduction to you and through you to the Assembly is Mr. Raj Tiwari, international Punjabi singer, with his group from India. He came all the way from India to take part in this Vaisakhi celebration along with Yash Sharma, editor of the *Asian Tribune*, and a constituent of mine, Paul Boparai. I would ask my guests in all of the galleries to please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also have three introductions to you and through you. It's my honour and distinct pleasure to introduce Mr. Mehar Singh Gill, president of Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha; Avtar Birk, who's also my constituent and general secretary for the same Gurdwara; as well as Darshan Gill from Siri Guru Singh Sabha, former president. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is my constituent and friend for many, many years, Mr. Tariq Chaudhry, president of Pakistan-Canada Association. Joining him today, also very good friends, are Iqbal Khan and Akmal Randalla. Please, gentlemen, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, for my final introduction I have Harbir Sandhu, Ranjit Powar, and Naib Sidhu. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a few members of the Sikh community who are very good friends of mine, Edmonton-Manning's, Edmonton-Ellerslie's, and, of course, yours. I will call their names and request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House: Mr. Verinder Grewar; Bota Gill; Joga Punimia; Sunny Briach; Manmohan Dhaliwal; Mager Ubihi; Gurmel Singh; Harjinder Gill; Lakhvinder Atwal; Hajinder Dhesi; Latt Bhinder; Parmjit Maget; Gurshan Buttar; Ashak Gagsane; and our guest from Calgary, Joginderpal Singh. Please rise for the traditional warm welcome of this House.

I also want to thank the people who prepared the food that we have all enjoyed today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition, I have you down for another introduction. They are not here yet? Okay.

Let us move on.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have two minutes each for your member's statements. Let's begin with Edmonton-Manning, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Vaisakhi Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today to speak about the Vaisakhi Day celebration that took place today under your watch in the Legislature. Vaisakhi marks the birth of the Sikh religion on the 14th of April, 1699, a traditional harvest festival season for Punjabis, and, according to the Bikrami calendar, the Sikh new year. The harvest season begins with the Vaisakhi celebration, and our farmers are happy to greet the crops. Sikhs reflect on the values and morals taught to them by their gurus and celebrate the birth of the Khalsa.

The Sikh community very much enjoys the values, freedom of speech, equality of life, and justice in Canada. These are the basic fundamental truths of the gurus' teachings. Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to see that Vaisakhi is celebrated in many parts of the world, especially here in Canada. Yesterday many ceremonies took place in Sikh temples. The Sikh community also believes in donating money and food to those who need it most such as the food bank.

Mr. Speaker, today members from my constituency, Edmonton-Manning, and members of the Sikh communities in Alberta came to celebrate with us here at the Legislature. Thank you to everyone who attended today and participated in this celebration. Members of the Sikh community are proud to say that they are proud Canadians. On behalf of the Sikh community we say thank you to Canada, who gave us a lot. Over the last 100-year history Canadian Sikhs have served and are still serving in fields such as the Canadian army, the RCMP, and within the Edmonton police force. Many have worked hard to become successful businessmen as well as successful politicians.

I sincerely invite our fellow Canadians to share in our Vaisakhi celebrations and parade coming up on the 18th of May in Mill Woods. Mr. Speaker, you have been part of that celebration for the last 10 years.

We are blessed to live in such a wonderful, multicultural Canada. I would like to wish everyone a happy Vaisakhi. God bless everyone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, the Education minister and his educators are rewriting the Alberta curriculum and changing the way mathematics and other subjects are taught. This push to inquiry-based, or discovery, learning is also fundamentally flawed, and it's not new. It has failed virtually everywhere it's been introduced, especially in the United States, and there is ample evidence that it is failing here. Our PISA scores have plummeted, we have fallen substantially in international and national rankings, and, perhaps most troubling, the number of

math-illiterate kids in this province has doubled since the introduction of this math in 2008. Study after study reveals what should be obvious: students who don't know their basics struggle as they move to higher levels.

I'm a parent. Most of us in this Legislature are parents. I know and you know that we should not be clouding our children's minds with multiple strategies to figure out five times six. The answer is 30. They should memorize it. It is a basic skill that will serve them well. The minister says that we need to teach our kids problem-solving skills as if this is a revelation. Does he not understand that having a high proficiency in fundamental math skills is proven to improve a student's problem-solving skills in critical thinking? You can't run before you walk.

New math textbooks like *Math Makes Sense* and *Math Focus* are the flawed recommended resources that Alberta Education is forcing on our students. Parents and many teachers are fed up with these new fuzzy math textbooks and unproven techniques. Alberta Ed should be giving our teachers the resources they need to help our kids. There is not one piece of empirical evidence that supports this inquiry-based, discovery-based model, yet all of the evidence shows that if you want to have math that teaches complex problem solving and critical thinking, you have to teach the basics.

I call on everybody to support us in calling on the minister to do this.

Family and Community Support Services

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak about the good work done by a group of outstanding Alberta organizations. Family and community support services operate in cities, towns, and municipalities across Alberta. They bring together partnerships between the provincial government, the local municipalities, and numerous charitable organizations serving their communities.

Local FCSS programs share a common goal with the Ministry of Human Services, that of creating better outcomes for all Albertans and their communities. FCSS program staff and volunteers in every corner of the province have been acknowledged by ministers and MLAs for their tremendous support in advancing the social policy framework and poverty reduction strategy by organizing and facilitating community conversations for comprehensive input into those plans.

Over 318 municipalities and Métis settlements participate in the provincial FCSS program, ensuring that Albertans have access to a strong network of prevention supports and social services. Over half of those municipalities now contribute far more than the required 20 per cent of FCSS funding because provincial investment in FCSS has not increased since 2009. They do so because monies invested in FCSS-funded programs provide a strong return in savings by reducing the social needs of those served, including involvement with health care, social supports, policing, and justice systems. In many rural communities the municipal FCSS program is the first and last contact for residents. Alberta FCSS programs face daily challenges to meet the needs of the rapidly increasing population and demand for services.

The FCSS program budget, as I said, has not increased in the past five years and does not account for population growth or annual inflation. The result is that FCSS is declining in its ability to maintain prevention supports for Albertans, and in many cases municipalities are now faced with reducing or eliminating prevention supports and funding to community agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, a reminder that you have 35 seconds for your questions and 35 seconds maximum for your supplementals.

Let's begin with the loyal opposition leader.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, let me also start with a few words on the horrific murders in Calgary. Our thoughts and deepest condolences go out to the families and friends of the victims of this incomprehensible act.

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, a week ago we revealed that AHS spent \$250 million on outside consultants for things like image and reputation reports, executive coaching, and art consultants. The waste doesn't end there. Today we released more documents showing that AHS has spent nearly \$1 billion on untendered sole-source contracts over two years. To the Health minister: why is Alberta Health Services spending so much money without even attempting to get the best deal for taxpayers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that again would be a wrong assumption. She has no idea whether they attempted to get the best deal or not. In fact, there are rules around sole-sourcing contracts, and in fact Alberta Health Services' contract policy indicates the criteria for deciding if a sole-sourcing arrangement is appropriate. The policy also requires that Alberta Health Services contact the managers' unit to review and approve appropriate contracts before the contracts are finalized. The Auditor General has selected and assessed a sample of sole-source contracts for compliance with the policy and found that the contracts complied with Alberta Health Services' sole-sourcing contract. The premise the hon. member puts forward is absolutely wrong.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, let me give the hon. Premier some more statistics. Of the almost 1,300 sole-source contracts we uncovered, 503 of them were above the maximum limit set by AHS in its sole-source policy. Together these contracts that violate the policy account for 98 per cent of the total billion-dollar bill. That means AHS violated its own policy 503 times by literally handing out contracts to hand-picked firms and individuals without a competitive bid. To the Health minister: how on earth is this acceptable?

Mr. Hancock: It's absolutely amazing that we have an officer of this Legislature, the Auditor General, who does a sampling survey of the contracts and finds nothing out of order, yet this hon. member can make an allegation like that in the House. The reality is that Alberta Health Services, like many health services, sometimes buys equipment from suppliers that are the only ones that supply the equipment. That would be a unique circumstance which would require a sole-source contract. I'm not going to speak to the individual specifications of each of these contracts, but I can say that I trust the Auditor General has audited the policies, has found that the policies are being adhered to, and the appropriate operation is being undertaken.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's answers are unacceptable. He routinely brushes aside these gross abuses of tax dollars as though they were nothing. We saw it last week with the outrageous consulting fees; we're seeing it again today. Clearly,

he sees absolutely no problem with this kind of waste. To the Premier: if the Health minister won't get to the bottom of how and why AHS wastes so much taxpayer money, will he find a Health minister that will?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this House that this Health minister, this Premier, and this government are very interested in Alberta Health Services and any other agency of government doing appropriate work with respect to the issuing of contracts, making sure that they're fair market value, making sure that we always get the best deal. What is not helpful for Albertans is for this hon. member to drag out one contract and somehow make the assumption that somebody has done something wrong. The Auditor General has the job of making sure that we review our expenses against our policies, has done that, and has found nothing wrong in this case.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions, hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Actually, the Health minister's job is to make sure AHS is following its policy each and every time.

Last week in this Legislature the Premier said this:

Virtually all of the contracts in this government go through an RFP process, with appropriate competition, but there are some times, in unique circumstances or when you need a unique talent, when you can sole source a contract.

In light of the information we've revealed today, is he still willing to stand by those words?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In fact, my understanding of the information that the hon. member is relying on today is that there are a number of those contracts which are buying specialized equipment and that have to be sole sourced because there's only one supplier. There may be other perfectly viable and valuable explanations for that, but this hon. member doesn't care. She wants to besmirch the reputation of everybody who works in the system instead of relying on the processes that we have. Auditors General make sure that the public's money is spent appropriately and that policies are adhered to.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's words have proven completely and utterly false. Alberta Health Services has sole sourced everything from food and beverage services to snow removal to paper shredding. They've sole sourced marriage counselling, public opinion polling, and, yes, even more executive coaching. They've even sole sourced a research firm to review their sole-sourcing policy. To the Premier: please tell me how these unique circumstances are requiring a unique talent.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can't tell her that, nor am I going to go back and look at two or three years of past sole-sourced contracts. The ones that she's talked about are a minimal portion of the ones put out, I'm given to understand. There are policies in place. People are expected to adhere to those policies. I understand that they have been reviewed and audited and that they have adhered to those policies. That's the appropriate way to deal with these things rather than going back and second-guessing people after the fact, picking out a supplier and saying: why four years ago did you do it this way? That's not the appropriate way to do it.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is 2012 and 2013, under the mandate of this government and that Health minister.

This government simply cannot go on defending the rotten contracting and spending practices at Alberta Health Services. It is bureaucratic waste at its worst, and taxpayers and patients are

paying the price. AHS was foisted on Albertans with a promise to reduce bureaucracy and get more money to the front line. The exact opposite has occurred. We know that this Health minister doesn't care, but let's hear from the Premier. Will he finally admit that AHS is a disaster and lead the way . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this Premier, this Health minister, and this government care very deeply about how Albertans are served and about how Albertans' money is spent effectively and efficiently. We've gone through a results-based budgeting process to look in all corners, to make sure we're achieving outcomes using Albertans' resources effectively and efficiently. We care about how Alberta Health Services does it, but we don't do that by going on a witch hunt and pulling out papers and waving them in the air. [interjections] We audit them against policies, we have the Auditor General audit them against policies, and if there are incidences of waste or problems with respect to contracts, we expect that to come to light in that process, and we deal with it in an appropriate way. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's just a struggle sometimes to hear overtop of the chattering that goes on across the bow, so please just keep it down, okay? That's all I'm asking. I'd like to not have to remind you again.

Let's go with the third main set of questions, please.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect this government and this Health minister to do his job.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Yesterday we asked for details on one of the 50 flights the former Premier took with a family member. During last year's June flood the Premier flew to Jasper for the weekend. The government has so far failed to provide any details about the trip, which was paid for entirely by taxpayers. Albertans deserve to know if their taxpayer dollars were used appropriately or if they paid for a long-weekend vacation in Jasper. Will the Premier tell us which government officials the former Premier met with that weekend and what government business was accomplished?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the former Premier herself asked the Auditor General to review the spending policies, review the flight policies, and review those expenses. This Premier and this Premier's office will co-operate with that. We'll make sure that the Auditor General has access to any of that. What we would like and, I think, what Albertans would like to know is that there are appropriate processes in place to determine whether issues are appropriate or not, whether policies have been followed or not, and whether Alberta taxpayers' money is being used wisely or not. They would also prefer that this House focus on the policy and interests of Albertans rather than a witch hunt from the opposition.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, why is this so hard? What government business was conducted at the Jasper Park Lodge during the height of the floods last June?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea, and I am not about to go back and check everybody's calendar to find out what they were doing on any given day. I'm not going to ask ministers to give me their calendars so I can check to see whether they had an appropriate meeting with somebody before they booked a flight. We have ministers of the Crown and Premiers who are charged

with doing the public's business. They do it well. They do it 24/7. They book flights when it is appropriate to do so. If any question is called into that, the appropriate way to investigate that question is to have the Auditor General do it. The Auditor General is doing it and will have access to all the information he needs to do that job.

2:00

The Speaker: Let's try again.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it boggles the mind that they can't even answer a simple question.

As we stated yesterday, this government can't be trusted to competently and appropriately make use of its air fleet. The government of British Columbia, which also has the need to travel to remote communities, uses commercial flights for the vast majority of their travel. They've sold off their aircraft and saved taxpayers the cost of maintaining the fleet. They also usually fly economy, which this government might want to try from time to time. Will the Premier commit to putting taxpayers first and sell the government fleet?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have already answered this question several times. The Auditor General is going to look at the efficiency and the taxpayer value for flights. I did take the liberty of checking to see what the charter flight would cost to go to High River. We did fly there a number of times last year because of the flood. A charter flight to High River is roughly \$4,000 from Edmonton. The flight cost for ATS was about \$1,400. Let's take Lloydminster. Lloydminster is a little farther away. Flight costs for the government plane to go to Lloydminster . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Thank you. Have a seat.

Let's just settle down here a little bit. I hear some outbursts coming from the government side now, I hear several coming from this side, and they're just not necessary, are they? They just aren't. They tend to create disorder, and they tend to create interventions by the Speaker. I'd like to avoid that.

Let's try to carry on. Let's go with the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, please, for your questions.

Government Spending

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The problems in health care aren't due to a lack of funding. Overall health spending is up from \$12 billion in 2007 to \$18.3 billion today, a 53 per cent increase compared to a 15 per cent increase in population. Since its inception AHS spending is up 73 per cent, from \$6 billion to \$10.5 billion, and still wait times are far too long today, a stunning example of AHS waste and why I've been calling for an audit. Premier, will you agree to conduct and make public a full forensic financial audit of AHS?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is an officer of this Legislature and has the duty and obligation to do an audit of public agencies, including AHS. He does that. There's the Public Accounts process if people want to question the annual reports or even question the Auditor. There are processes in place every year for audits to happen, and we expect that the business of government will go on, the business of Alberta Health Services will go on. The hon. member referenced the increase in services. We're very proud of the fact that Albertans get some of the best health care in the world right here in Alberta. People come from

all over western Canada for heart surgery, for liver transplants, for many other services that are provided right here in this province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, a full forensic audit of AHS is what we're asking for. Yeah, you do get world-class care once you get in.

Let's try to get to the bottom of this waste and mismanagement another way. After Alberta Liberals exposed a suspicious sole-source contract granted to Navigator, a who's who of Tory land, I wrote the Auditor General asking for a review of these contacts. Following today's revelations the need for an investigation into all sole-source contracting is a no-brainer. To the Premier: will you join me by asking the Auditor General to investigate your government's overall policy of awarding sole-source contracts?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's not necessary to ask the Auditor General to do his job. He does it on an ongoing basis. In fact, with Alberta Health Services he's audited it twice now with respect to sole-source contracts and followed up with the recommendation that he made. He's made comments within his report, and he's indicated that he assessed a sample of sole-source contracts for compliance with the policy and found that the contracts complied with Alberta Health Services' sole-source criteria. These hon. members would want to use up all the resources of the public in looking at how all the resources of the public were used up. We want to use them in the best interests of the public, providing the services that they need.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals aren't calling for an audit of a little sample; we're asking for an audit of these billions that could be better spent.

As we saw with the untendered contracts for Navigator and again today, the current rules allow for sole-source contracting under \$75,000. That makes it way too easy for this government to avoid accountability by splitting them up into small contracts. Alberta Liberals have proposed a motion this session that will put a stop to this practice once and for all. To the Premier: will you commit to open, public tendering of contracts and put an end to sole-source contracting once and for all?

Mr. Hancock: First the hon. member suggests that he's got a motion in the House that he wants the House to debate and make decision on and make a recommendation, then he wants to preempt his own motion by asking me to do it ahead of time without any debate. I don't understand the nature of this person's understanding of democracy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The public-sector unions have been saying it, the pension boards have been saying it, and now the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has said it: Alberta's public-sector pensions are sustainable as is with no changes. They're good. Really. Why has the Minister of Finance told Albertans just the opposite?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it isn't just the Minister of Finance that has suggested that we have to address this problem now. The unfunded liability that is currently on the books has been addressed through the contribution rates the members are making. We've said that all along. This is not a great revelation

for either the hon. member or for the unions. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview asked the Auditor General in Public Accounts the other day whether or not this was a premature decision. The Auditor General said, "No. To consider these plans at this time is imperative because the contribution rates have reached, in the view of many people, an unaffordable level." It is our duty to do this to save the pension . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance has misrepresented what the Auditor General had said. It is clear that these plans are sustainable, which leaves many Albertans wondering: why is this Minister of Finance determined to weaken them? Why does the Finance minister want to force public employees to work longer and retire with less?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the pension promise that we have for our employees in the defined benefit plan, which 85 per cent of Albertans do not enjoy, is that when they retire, they will receive a percentage – five years, usually the five best years in their employment – for the rest of their life regardless of how much they have put into that pension plan. In July 2012 we went to all of the boards, and we said: we need to make sure that that pension promise is sustainable into the future for those members. That's exactly what we've done. These things have been in consultation for the last almost two years. We will actually do what . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The only people that this minister has consulted with on this are the pension boards, and they've told them that the plans are fine.

Every time that this government refuses to negotiate and imposes its will through legislation, it provides more evidence that it is arrogant and out of touch. Here we go again. To the Finance minister: why do you insist on dictating instead of negotiating?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm actually quite pleased that the hon. member has brought the concept of negotiation into the House, because that's exactly what we will be doing about joint sponsorship of the plans, about the contribution rate caps that are going to help sustain these plans. What is arrogant and perhaps even misleading to Albertans and the pension plan holders is the fact that this is going to lessen their pension. The pension promise at age 65 is exactly what we are trying to save for all of those members of the plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. The taxpayers' waste at Alberta Health Services knows no bounds. As has already been pointed out, AHS spent nearly \$1 billion on sole-sourced, untendered contracts over a two-year period. The one that particularly caught my eye was a \$110,000 contract to review exclusive AHS procurement contracts. Yes, Mr. Speaker, unbelievably, they sole-sourced a contract to review their sole-source policy. To the Premier. I'm curious. Just what was the outcome of this review, and when will they be making changes to the policy?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, allow me to speculate because that is what I'll be doing. As I said to the House earlier, the Auditor General actually reviewed Alberta Health Services' sole-sourcing policy and said that they needed to review their policy and update it. I would suspect they probably hired a contractor from outside to review their policy so that it could be updated. I suspect it was actually successful because in the subsequent review of sole-sourcing by Alberta Health Services, the Auditor General said: we found that the contracts complied with Alberta Health Services' sole-sourcing criteria.

2:10

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, this Premier has to learn what's happening, truly.

Given that AHS violated its own sole-source contract policy 503 times in only two years, how can anyone be confident that the Audit and Finance Committee, who the Health minister claims is responsible, is actually doing their job? Will you table the report on sole-sourcing contracts from the Audit and Finance Committee?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to take that under advisement for the Minister of Health to determine. I mean, Alberta Health Services is an agency of the government. I'm not sure where that report is or what it is. You wouldn't expect me to know that off the cuff today. But we'll take that under advisement and see if there's a report there and, if so, if it can be appropriately tabled. One thing this government is convinced of is that the public needs to know the policies, the programs, and how their funds are spent. That's why we have appropriate processes so that instead of taking these things out of context they can be done in a thorough and reviewable manner.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about policies and processes. Given that last week the Health minister brushed aside our questions about AHS misspending, saying, "I challenge her to present those questions to the Public Accounts Committee," I'd like to ask a question of the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Will you immediately call AHS before the committee so we can get to the bottom of waste and mismanagement?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, that is a fantastic question. The Public Accounts Committee, of course, is tasked with looking at previous years' spending by government and their agencies to see if the money was spent properly. So I would be happy – happy – to bring this motion forward to the Public Accounts Committee. Although the government, of course, has the majority of members on that committee, they are responsible members. I know they want to get to the bottom of this as soon as possible. I'm confident that that motion will pass, and we can get to the bottom of these expenses.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will clarify later about questions to chairs of committees.

Let's move on. Edmonton-South West, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Daycare

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it's very well known by now that my constituency of Edmonton-South West is home to many new families composed of young working parents and their children. Young parents are frequently put in the

difficult position of having to either sacrifice a second household income or seek out child care. One daycare, Global Aware Care, in my constituency is on the verge of shutting down services because of a lack of transportation. In these new communities especially it's very important to look into ways to encourage operation of daycares. My question is to the Minister of Human Services. What sorts of government supports are provided for on-site daycares so that we as parents can entrust our children . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely agree with the member that it makes a lot of sense to have daycares located in places that are most convenient for parents and where parents are actually close by. Ultimately, the decision has to be made by private organizations or nonprofits, but what we do is provide for wage top-ups and some training and retention promotion funds that are available for staff once they become accredited to ensure that we have high-quality daycare programs in the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: given that transportation options to and from southwest schools to daycare facilities are increasingly difficult for parents to plan for, will you commit future plans to dedicate space to child care options permanently within our schools?

The Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Education I'd like to say that although it is always a plus to have schools with daycare facilities attached, this is something that has to be made at a local level based on enrolments in the local schools. The first priority for those particular schools is the K to 12 enrolment. However, we'd like to see, in cases where it's possible, more and more co-operation and collaboration between schools and daycare facilities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that daycare costs are continuing to soar and given that it's often not worth it financially to return to work after parental leave, what incentives can your department currently provide in order to encourage parents to return to the workplace?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, it was in 2012 that the government changed its income threshold from \$35,000 up to \$50,000. That means that individuals making \$50,000 and below are eligible for a subsidy on their daycare somewhere in the range of up to 600 some-odd dollars per student. This is a very important piece that allows nearly 25,000 students to be supported on any given day through this particular program. It allows a lot of families to get financial assistance to make sure that they can return to the workforce if they so choose.

School Construction and Modernization

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, Satchel Paige, an old MLB player, once said, "If you tell a lie, always rehearse it." A few members of cabinet have crafted a story about the 50/70 school plan, but they really should have spent more time together in the rehearsal process. Last year the Education minister was a bit more up front

and admitted that a lot of these projects will take up to six years to complete. But the Infrastructure minister is declaring that all 120 projects will be done by 2016. With no shovels in the ground, which of these timelines should Albertans believe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat what I've said in this House before, and perhaps the hon. member will listen. We do have every intention of getting those schools open for the 2016 school year. I will remind the hon. member that the shovel in the ground isn't the first step. There's planning, and there's co-operation with the school boards across the province, with the Ministry of Education, and then with Infrastructure. We are working with the construction industry. We'll get those schools built. We're building Alberta. It's what Albertans want, and it's what that member wouldn't make happen.

Mr. Barnes: Two years in we've started zero schools.

Admitting their own incompetence, the government finally listened to the Calgary board of education's proposal to take care of building some local schools themselves. Will this government commit to giving other local school boards and local builders the chance to competitively build their own projects so that some of these projects actually have a shot at completion before the next election?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member says in the first question that we're not started and in the second question acknowledges that we're well along the way working with school boards and the construction industry. I think he'd better check his own notes. Of course, he doesn't write it himself; somebody upstairs tells him what to say.

But on this side we do the work. I can tell the hon. member and all Albertans that we're working closely with the construction industry, with the school boards. Our intention is to get those schools open for Albertans in 2016. It's still our intention. Building Alberta isn't something that's a joke, Mr. Speaker. It's something we take seriously. We're doing it. That hon. member would never get it done.

Mr. Barnes: It's a big promise. A lot of sensitivity over there.

With a massive sole-source contract for 19 P3 schools, with the Infrastructure minister then admitting no plan for 100 of the 120 school projects, with the Education minister flip-flopping between projected completion times of three and six years, tell me: will the Premier also stand behind his colleagues' promise that these schools will all be done before the next election?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want schools for their children, and they want modern schools for their children. This government has promised to deliver those schools, and this government will deliver those schools by the opening date that we indicated, which, I believe, is in the fall of 2016.

The Speaker: Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Kinship Care

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was reassured by the recent decision of Human Services to sign an information-sharing agreement with the Calgary Police Service that will be used to speed up the placement of children at risk with extended family members and close friends in kinship care arrangements. Anything

that can help to reduce the number of children that have to go into emergency foster care is certainly a good thing. My question is for the Minister of Human Services. How often is a tool like this needed in the city of Calgary?

2:20

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we could have as many as about 90 children a month that come into care in and around the Calgary area. Now, a lot of these children can come into care for a variety of different reasons, everything from issues of neglect to issues of very extreme abuse. It's my hope that those children, that have been through some sort of trauma, are provided with a safe, loving place to stay, hopefully with somebody that they know, a family member, a family friend. I'm hoping that this process will allow us to place them with someone they know within hours.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister and your department, for your sensitivity on a day like today in Alberta.

Given that privacy is such a delicate matter in these cases, should the general public be concerned about privacy breaches in light of such an agreement?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, my first and foremost priority is the protection of children and ensuring that the trauma that they may have experienced is reduced as much as possible as quickly as possible. My priority is to make sure that we get the data and information needed as soon as possible to make better assessments as soon as possible so that within a period of hours, not weeks or days – this is my hope – those children are within the arms of loved ones when they need it most.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. My final question is for the Minister of Justice. What can be done by your department to reduce the time it takes for private citizens to get a security check for those who wish to volunteer?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for that question. Security checks are typically processed by local police, and I'd be happy to facilitate a meeting with her local police detachment in Calgary-Glenmore.

One thing I just did want to mention is that we don't want to have excessive barriers to volunteer, but at the same time, as the Minister of Human Services has mentioned, children's safety is absolutely paramount. I have full confidence in our police service that they're effecting that as a number one priority.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Public Service Pensions

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Finance minister gives no proof to support his fears that the public pension plans are unsustainable due to unfunded liabilities and increased longevity of our hard-working public employees. In fact, these fears have been shown to be baseless by independent actuaries and economists. The Minister of IIR admitted last week that

“current . . . liabilities will be paid down over . . . 12 years.” To the Premier: why are you allowing this minister to forge ahead with his fabricated, fear-driven, Republican-style attack on hard-working Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Wow. Mr. Speaker, when we had meetings with the boards of all four of the pensions which the Ministry of Finance is the trustee of, one of the things that we talked about was sustainability into the future. One of the reasons we were talking about sustainability into the future was because of the \$7.5 billion unfunded liability of today. We also recognized at that time that the unfunded liability of today was being handled in the contribution rates currently paid by employers and employees, taxpayers and employees. What we're talking about is the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government contradicts itself in saying that public service pension plans are both healthy and unsustainable, yet they won't give the workers guaranteed cost-of-living increases, unlike high-ranking political staff. To the Premier again: why does the government only guarantee pensions for high-ranking political staff and threaten the well-being of the hard-working, everyday people that keep us safe, healthy, and make sure that the province is working?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the management employees pension plan is one of the ones that we're proposing to close off. In fact, we will be suggesting that after 2015 there would be no new entrants to that plan, that management would actually enter into the same plan that employees are in, probably with a supplementary.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to come back to this. What we care about is maintaining the pension promise for employees of today and tomorrow. The opposition, especially the opposition over there, should understand that we are protecting employees of the past, of the present, and the future for their benefit.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, they're going to retire our seniors into poverty.

The Finance minister says that he consulted with pension boards, but he didn't say that there was agreement because there wasn't any. Stripping pension plan boards of their powers and bullying these groups who disagree with them is very routine here given bills 28, 45, and 46. Premier, when will you stop this abuse of power?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's extremely unfortunate that every time a member opposite wants to raise an issue, they call it bullying. The fact of the matter is that there was consultation, as the hon. Provincial Treasurer mentioned. It started in 2012, and it continued through 2013 because we have an obligation to our employees to ensure a sustainable pension fund. It's about public discussion, appropriate public discourse, coming to a resolution. In government you have to make tough decisions. That's not bullying. That's listening, learning, and acting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Family and Community Support Services

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 40 years FCSS has supported community mental health programs, family intervention

services, child care, and seniors' programs, to name a few. Yet even as this government pays lip service to early intervention, FCSS funding has been virtually frozen for a decade. By failing to keep pace with population and inflation, FCSS has been cut by almost one-half since 2004. To the Minister of Human Services: why does his government care so little about supporting communities to care for their most vulnerable neighbours?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, our government makes substantial investments in protecting everyday, hard-working Alberta families and those that need our supports in times when they're down. FCSS is a great program. We're glad we have it, and we'll continue to work with all of our partners across this province to make sure Albertans are looked after when they need it most.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that underfunding forces FCSS to reduce or even eliminate funding for programs that keep seniors secure in their home or, say, keep families intact and successful and given that the slow demise of community supports is the predictable result of this PC government's misplaced priorities, why won't the Minister of Human Services replace empty platitudes with action and increase FCSS funding to make up for your years of neglect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year the Human Services budget is going up about 5.5 per cent. We have various different investments that we're making on the front line to help people in their most difficult times and to do a lot more early intervention work; for example, working with our parent link centres to be able to help reach families that may potentially have issues of domestic abuse. So we're investing very heavily in early intervention services, and we'll continue to work with our partners to make sure Albertans are protected.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you're not investing; you're freezing.

Now, given that when there's a press release to be sent, this government is the first to fill it with empty promises to help vulnerable Albertans and given that the real story is that by cutting almost 50 per cent, either services are significantly diluted or the number of people shut out from these early intervention services is growing drastically every single year, I'll ask again: why won't this minister increase funding to FCSS to make up for his government's decade of disregard?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, this year's budget for Human Services, as I said, has an increase of about 5.5 per cent: 6 per cent in the area of child intervention, 5.9 per cent for support for persons with disabilities, 4.5 per cent for AISH, 6.7 per cent in the area of child care, 17 per cent in the area of homelessness. We're investing in areas that help support Albertans when they need it most, and we'll continue to do so.

Health Care System

Mr. Rowe: Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding are hearing of all the latest news involving Alberta Health Services mispending hundreds of millions of dollars, and they're outraged. Wait times to access surgery in the central zone are not improving. A year ago the average wait for a knee replacement was 26.6 weeks; today it's 33.2 weeks. Hip replacements were 21.3 weeks; now they're

27.1 weeks. Can someone from this government explain to my constituents why access to health care continues to get worse while spending continues to climb higher and higher?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred thousand people a year move to this province. The province is growing. New ways of treating patients are invented every year. There's new equipment every year. We do more hips, more hearts, more procedures every year on almost an exponential basis. More Albertans are getting service every year. Yes, it is important for us to get the wait times down so that they can get those services. But if you take a look at the system we have, people come from all across western Canada to the Stollery centre to get liver transplants, to get heart procedures done, to get the very high level of service that this province and this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rowe: Given that long-term care spaces in Didsbury and Three Hills were cut so this government could save a dollar today only to have Alberta Health Services spend it on art consultants or high-priced image consultants, to the Premier: does this government really think it's right that families in my constituency are being separated when they enter continuing care as a result of the complete mismanagement of our health care dollars?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's not right that any family members are separated as a result of a health incident or deteriorating health. In fact, this government would like to ensure that we have in place the services that Albertans need so that there can be quality of life right through to the end of life. That's the goal of this government. But one cannot meet that goal by picking apart this piece and that piece and saying: if you saved a dollar on this corner, you could use it there. It's a very complex system. It requires intelligent people running the system. Yes, there are ways that we can improve the system, and we look every day to improve the system. I'd ask this hon. member and others to do that in a respectful way, to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rowe: Given that patients waiting for something as serious as a scheduled heart surgery now sit on a waiting list for an average of 22 weeks, 30 per cent longer than they did last year, again to the Premier: how can Albertans have any confidence in this government and this Health minister when every performance indicator imaginable shows that access to health care is getting worse and worse, year over year?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think what Albertans have confidence in is the fact that when they need services, they can get the services. Yes, there are wait times, and we need to work very, very diligently to get those wait times down to more acceptable levels, absolutely. You cannot build a system that's available at the moment a person needs services, but what we can build and what we have is a health service that's available when people need them on an urgent basis. There's a triage process. People get in when they need it. Yes, we need to work at making sure that the waits for the rest are shorter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Little Bow.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear from municipalities and constituents in northern Alberta about the inconsistencies of maintenance on our highways. My question this afternoon is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. In order to protect the long-term maintenance and the viability of our highways, what is your department doing to make sure that these roads will last for the lifetime of the projects?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. We share some common interests. Budget 2014 has an increase of \$200 million over the next three years for highway rehabilitation and maintenance. That's a total of \$735 million for highway rehab. This is equal to about 2,500 kilometres of provincial highways that will be rehabbed. You know, Alberta has a total of 31,000 kilometres of road, 28,000 of which are paved, and 4,000 bridges. We understand the need to protect these assets.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really excited to hear that. That's wonderful news.

The problem I have is that I continually hear about problems with delineator posts and signposts that have been down for many years, and these are very important, especially at rural intersections on a snowy, windy night. Can the minister assure me that these maintenance contracts will be looked at and make sure that these delineator posts for the safety of our rural residents will be installed again?

Mr. Drysdale: Delineator posts are often sheared off by snowplows, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we had a long, hard winter, so I think that there were a lot of posts that got shaved off this winter. Also, the movement of agricultural equipment, the wide equipment – I might even have been guilty of that myself once in a while, going down the highway. But, you know, highway maintenance contractors do inspect our delineator posts regularly for damage. We also followed the new national standards two years ago, and we increased the delineator strip from two inches to four inches.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final comment is on the quality of paint that the department seems to be using. Typically, once the lines have been painted on the highways, they seem to disappear within the first week or whenever the first rain comes. Could the minister assure us that paint that will be used with the increase in the budget will be of a higher quality?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, many Canadian provinces have problems with highway paint because, of course, like I said before, snow removal, the snowplows scraping the highway, is hard on our paint. Our maintenance contractors work every summer to repaint areas where needed. We test all paint for a full year to make sure it's suitable for Alberta roads. We did have a problem in 2010 and 2011 with our paint, but we worked with

manufacturers and painting applicators to develop a stronger testing process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Barrhead-Morinville, Westlock.

Highway 3 Intersection at Coalhurst

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the month of March concerned citizens from the town of Coalhurst canvassed the area to make three simple changes to the highway 3 intersection in town. The initiative was led by two outstanding community-minded individuals, Taylor Hewlett and Jake Vanschothorst, whose goal was to improve traffic flow and save lives. To the Minister of Transportation: these are priorities repeated countless times by the town of Coalhurst council and now by almost a thousand citizens in this petition. Will your government listen and make sure these improvements are a priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Since becoming Minister of Transportation, I have heard from a number of people about the concerns with this intersection on highway 3. The increased traffic there is a concern. The problem is that, you know, the county of Lethbridge and the town of Coalhurst haven't always agreed on what the proper solution is there. My colleagues, especially the Minister of Municipal Affairs, have been meeting with the municipalities there, and I hear that they're coming up with an agreement. I don't want to go down there and do something if half of the people don't agree on the right process. But it sounds like we're close to an agreement on what needs to be done there, and when we have the agreement, we'll move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow. First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that of the three suggestions that are in here, two of them come at relatively no cost to the province – the first one increases awareness by adding flashing lights and alerting motorists of the important intersection ahead, and the second one reduces speed in the area – and given that these suggestions are something the minister can do today, will the minister take my constituents' safety seriously? Please look at these ideas, and tell me if it's possible to implement them.

Mr. Drysdale: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at all the aspects of safety there. There are quite a few different things we can do there, but we want to make sure that we incorporate them all together at the same time and make the proper decision for the area. We'll be moving forward with that as soon as possible.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that the third suggestion is to increase the length of the deceleration lane that moves towards the tracks to improve visibility as you go north and given that this fall there's a plan to implement the overlay for highway 3, will this minister save taxpayers' money and address these very serious concerns and safety concerns by completing the third suggestion in tandem with this fall's highway 3 overlay?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we'll look at all suggestions. You know, that's one of them: right in, right out. There are quite a few different options there. There's a road in from the back, from the other side. So I'm sure we're going to be

doing some asphalt work there, and we'll work it all together in one process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Highwood.

Provincial Diploma Examinations

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent constituency week I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of grade 12 students in the Westlock library. We had a sit-down discussion about diploma exams. Not only were the students there, but we also had a school trustee from Pembina Hills division as well as a superintendent and R.F. Staples staff. A big part of the discussion was regarding the purpose the exams serve and the fact that they're worth 50 per cent of the grade. To the Minister of Education and perhaps the Premier: could you please explain to my constituents of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock why diploma exams are worth 50 per cent of the grade 12 students' final marks?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fairness to all students is a cornerstone of the whole diploma examination program. There can be a great variation in assessment across the province from one school board or one school to another. Assessment practices vary, but a diploma examination certifies a student's achievement against a province-wide standard. The equal weighting of the diploma examination with the school mark assures all students that their marks are fair and reliable. That's important because when they go to postsecondary, Alberta students actually do very well because of the respect for our diploma results.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that B.C. universities add 3 and a half per cent to student applicants from Alberta and Saskatchewan universities let in Alberta students who border on that line of acceptance, can you please tell me and my constituents if there's any discussion regarding changing the current practice of diploma exams counting 50 per cent, and could that be lowered?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the present time there is not a discussion about changing the percentage weight of the diploma exams. However, I would say this. Curriculum redesign is under way, and when you do curriculum design, you have to actually do examination redesign. As part of that examination redesign it would be appropriate to consider the weighting of those exams and how you can continue to assure that same standard of fairness with respect to marks across the province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you. Can the Premier please detail why there is a current shift to machine scoring for all written questions, not just multiple choice, and why this is being considered a benefit to students?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, technology is taking over our lives. The reality is that when you can do something using technology, it can reduce costs, and it can create more standardization. If it works appropriately – that's the real question

here, to test to see how and where it can be used appropriately – then those resources saved can be applied to other parts of the system, making even better investments in education for all students across the province. Machine scoring is one tool that is being explored, that's being investigated, being used where appropriate for Alberta students so that we can use the resultant resources in other places for more . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, that concludes the time for Oral Question Period. I've received a couple of notes. I'm just going to comment on them briefly, and we'll take a 30-second break to carry on with private members' statements.

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: First of all, with regard to preambles after the fifth main question I've reminded you every day except today, and a number of you sort of forgot that and went on with preambles. However, I also noted some disruptions when some people had what appeared to be a long preamble, but in actual fact they were using the word "given" ahead of their preamble, so to speak. We've always allowed that, but today it just seemed that there were some exceptionally long "givens" given.

Secondly, questions are permitted to chairs of our standing committees. As you would know from looking at the inside of your *Hansard* every day, we have 10 standing and special committees of the Legislative Assembly. However, the caveat, the rule, which has been followed since 1997, at least in this Chamber, is that those questions must pertain to agenda items or scheduling matters, not specifically the workings and machinations and procedures. I interpreted the question from Calgary-Fish Creek as being one pertaining to an agenda item. In fact, the hon. member had said something in the second supplemental about calling AHS before the committee. To me, that sounded like she wanted it placed on the agenda. That's how I interpreted it, and that's why it was allowed to proceed.

Thirdly, tomorrow I will remind you of what the proper uses and protocols are regarding tablets, iPads, and other electronic devices. I've received some notes from some members asking for clarification. I shouldn't have to remind you, but I will because it's in the procedural letter that I sent to you, I believe, a month or two ago; in any event, before session started. But I will present that again for your use tomorrow.

Thirty seconds from now let us continue with the private members' statements, starting with Calgary-Bow. Just before we hear from Calgary-Bow, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Bev DeSantis. Bev and her husband Carl are very good friends of mine and have been for many years. A little known fact about Bev is that it's a toss-up whether she loves Carl or Rod Stewart more, but

she loves them both. I know that, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have Bev join us here, and I hope she enjoys her visit to the Legislature. It's my honour to introduce her, and I invite members of the House to give her the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-Cross.

Alberta International Offices

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2014 and our government's building Alberta plan is about taking tangible actions to build new markets for our products that attract international investment so that we can keep investing in what matters most. Over the last year alone this government's focus on building new markets in Asia resulted in at least \$460 million in new investment and trade for Alberta. Alberta's international offices played a critical role in strengthening Alberta's relationships with foreign governments, promoting Alberta's businesses internationally, and telling Alberta's story on the world stage.

Last year 651 Alberta companies worked with our international offices to advance their international business objectives. Having on-the-ground resources enabled us to facilitate more than 1,400 business introductions, resulting in 197 negotiations and follow-up meetings. Our offices helped to facilitate 128 trade and investment missions to Alberta and over 270 missions to markets abroad in 2013.

In today's competitive global marketplace this work is critical. The expansion of our international office network, supported by Budget 2014, will substantially strengthen Alberta's presence internationally, enhancing our ability to attract investment, facilitate trade, and support Alberta's businesses. This will result in more rapid economic growth and diversification of the economy and provide companies with access to new technologies and expertise.

Our government will continue opening new markets to create more economic opportunity, investment, jobs, and revenues that support the programs and services Albertans rely upon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Wrestling Championships

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to highlight a very important event for youth that was held at Lester B. Pearson high school in my constituency on March 7 and 8. The 2014 Alberta Schools' Athletic Association provincial championship had 302 top wrestlers from across Alberta compete this year. Fifty-four urban and rural schools were represented throughout the province.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, wrestling is a very elite level of competition that showcases the ability and the talent of our young athletes. All of the competitors worked hard to reach their goals. Their commitment to training and their drive to succeed are admirable.

Mr. Speaker, there were 84 gold, silver, and bronze medals in 28 weight categories that were awarded to the winning athletes. They competed as individuals and contributed points for their school in the team population for both boys and girls. The schools that had the most points received a plaque for first, second, and third place.

In addition to the athletes at Lester B. Pearson school, they hosted 400 spectators, family members, coaches, and officials. One hundred student volunteers and 80 staff members welcomed and assisted guests. The wonderful brunch, that was prepared and served by Pearson students and staff, was enjoyed by well over 600 people.

I would like to thank Greg Weir, principal at Lester B. Pearson high school, and recognize outstanding coaches Lindsay Marsh and Kai Kleinitz. Their tremendous efforts in organizing the planning of this athletic event was a year in the making.

Wrestling is a sport that requires determination, sportsmanship, and excellence. I would ask members of the Assembly and you, Mr. Speaker, to please join me in offering our warmest congratulations to each and every competitor who participated at the championship competition because each of them was an inspiration to all of us.

2:50 Flood Recovery and Mitigation in High River

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last summer's flood devastated High River, and my hometown is still struggling to get back on its feet. Nowhere in Alberta were as many people's homes and businesses destroyed by the raging waters as they were in High River.

This government often describes the flood as a \$6 billion event. Sadly, very little of that money has actually gone to the people who were hurt the most. Houses still sit empty and derelict. Businesses are still shuttered. The province of Alberta is getting at least \$2.8 billion in federal dollars to pay flood costs, but the amount of money that has gone to rebuilding homes in High River is in the \$48 million range. Less than 2 per cent of the money spent on the flood has made its way to those who were the hardest hit. Lots of money has flowed to sole-source contractors, who have been too slow, too expensive, and too uncaring of the needs of our communities.

This file has been grossly mismanaged. The government doesn't like hearing that from us, but anyone who's had to deal with the disaster recovery program, the messed-up contracting process, and the endless bureaucracy knows it to be true. It isn't just the contractors that have messed up. Parts of this file that belong directly to the government are also in chaos, and that is hurting everyone in High River. For example, this government's reliance on the 1992 flood maps and its reluctance to update the maps are having an impact on everyone in High River, even those lucky few who were not flooded.

You see, Mr. Speaker, without new and accurate flood maps insurance companies do not know how to assess and mitigate the risk. Without that data insurance companies don't want to write homeowner policies in High River, and the few who do write policies have dramatically increased their rates and their deductibles and have substantially curtailed their coverage. The absence of adequate and reasonable insurance coverage threatens the viability of every business in High River. It also threatens the economic and emotional security of every resident.

The government needs to solve this problem. It's the right thing to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A, are clear evidence that this government is not listening to the demands of all Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Little Bow I'm tabling two different petitions asking for the government to take a look at extending and moving the westbound deceleration lane, moderately reducing the speed on both sides of the Coalhurst intersection, and installing yellow flashing warning-light signs on both sides of the Coalhurst intersection.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Acting Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plan regulations the 2012-2013 provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Griffiths, Minister of Service Alberta, responses to Written Question 16, Written Question 17, Written Question 18, and Written Question 29, asked for by Mr. Kang on April 14, 2014.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Famous Five

The Speaker: Hon. members, we don't appear to have any points of order today. However, we do have a minute or two on the clock, so if you'll allow me, I'd like to just make a brief statement about the Famous Five.

I'm pleased to announce the installation of an enhanced exhibit in our Legislature Building. If you visit the fifth floor of our

building, you'll be very pleased to see that a stunning new tribute to the accomplishments of the Famous Five abounds there. The Famous Five, of course, were and are Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, and Nellie McClung. These five women shared the belief that all women play an essential role in politics and, if given the chance, could contribute a great deal to building a better Canada. Prior to October 18, 1929, the BNA Act did not consider women as "persons," which, in turn, prevented women from service within the Senate of Canada, where they could fully participate in the parliamentary system and effect meaningful change.

The group of five, however, challenged the interpretation of the act and marched forward to change the status of women in Canada. Their legal battle, which is known to all of us as the Persons Case, set a precedent for how the word "person" would be interpreted thereafter by the highest court of Canada, thus planting the seeds of reform within our legislative and judicial systems. In their ruling the Privy Council described the BNA Act as "a living tree capable of growth and expansion within its natural limits." From this, the living tree doctrine was established, changing the way Canadian law was interpreted and, within that law, forever entrenching women's rights.

The ruling on the Persons Case remains a landmark decision, and the Famous Five continue to symbolize not only women's rights but also the evolution of Canadian equality. They were posthumously appointed honorary Senators in 2009. The Famous Five: their names are now and forever known to us all.

The exhibit is currently open for public viewing as part of our free guided tours. I hope to further honour the legacy of the Famous Five on the 85th anniversary of the ruling of the Persons Case, which will be in October. However, I bring it to your attention now because I did not want to keep the exhibit closed until October since we receive thousands upon thousands of visitors here, and I wanted it open. I'm just telling you why we are not doing an official opening at this time. It will be done later in conjunction with the anniversary.

Hon. members, we are now at the end of our afternoon sitting. Routine has completed, and we are going to proceed to estimates. At 3:30 p.m. the Families and Communities Committee will consider the estimates for Justice and Solicitor General in committee room A. At the same time, Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for International and Intergovernmental Relations in committee room B. Tonight at 7 you're all invited to the Families and Communities Committee meeting, where they will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Culture in committee room A.

That being said, the House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:58 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 16, 2014

Issue 19

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
 Premier
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Hon. Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
Hughes, Ken, Calgary-West (PC)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),
 Liberal Opposition Whip
Kennedy-Glans, Donna, QC, Calgary-Varsity (Ind)
Khan, Stephen, St. Albert (PC)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
 Leader of the New Democrat Opposition
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)
McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
 New Democrat Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)
Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Hon. Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Redford, Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC)
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
 Official Opposition Whip
Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
 Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC),
 Government Whip
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (Ind)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 58 Wildrose: 17 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 3

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

Executive Council

Dave Hancock	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Human Services
Robin Campbell	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta
Rick Fraser	Associate Minister – Public Safety Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Service Alberta
Fred Horne	Minister of Health
Doug Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Sandra Jansen	Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Education, Ministerial Liaison to the Canadian Forces
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Ric McIver	Minister of Infrastructure
Diana McQueen	Minister of Energy
Frank Oberle	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dave Quest	Associate Minister – Seniors
Dave Rodney	Associate Minister – Wellness
Donald Scott	Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation
Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

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Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

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Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 16, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Life and health are truly precious. When they are lost, we all grieve. Today let us remember those who are no longer among us. Let our thoughts be positive, and let them be filled with compassion, understanding, and prayer. May all blessings be upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

State Funeral for the Hon. Jim Flaherty

The Speaker: Hon. members, today the state funeral is being held for the late Hon. Jim Flaherty. Accordingly and in keeping with Alberta provincial protocols, our provincial flags have been lowered to half-mast. On behalf of all Albertans all of us join with all Canadians to mourn the passing of the late Hon. Jim Flaherty. We pay tribute to his dedicated public service, and we express our deepest condolences to his family and friends. The state funeral is now under way, and it takes precedence.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us begin with school groups, starting with Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the sharpest, the coolest, the most exciting, and the brightest students of Edmonton-Mill Woods's Hillview elementary school along with their teacher, Herman Chang, and two teacher helpers, Mrs. Tracy Ross and Mrs. Janice Davison. I will request that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you two classes, 56 students in total, from Lynnwood school. They are joined by their teachers, Sheldon Durstling and Erin Bayly, and parents Angela Shymko, Stacy van Cingel, Pam Wallace, and Ibeth Pinilla-Canon. They're all seated in the gallery. If they could all stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 23 bright young grade 6 students from a school that used to be in an area that you represented, Mr. Speaker, Rutherford school, but who are here today from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Sandra Colquhoun, and parent volunteer Pam Van Lersberghe. I would now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, if I may, it's just to acknowledge and recognize a group that will join us in a few minutes. They're a group from Heart Valley Christian school, next to Wanham. They will have travelled just about six hours one way to get here to visit and spend some time in the Legislature, so I just wanted to acknowledge that they will join us a little later.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Are there others?

If not, let us proceed with other special guests, beginning with Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to welcome to your gallery today 16 individuals who are the 2014 nominees for the Ernest C. Manning innovation awards, Canada's most prestigious innovation awards. The Ernest C. Manning innovation awards have been recognizing Canadian innovators of all ages with the imagination to innovate and the stamina to succeed. Albertans are well represented as recipients of Manning awards since they were established some 33 years ago as a national award program, named after Alberta Premier Ernest C. Manning. This year there are 56 nominees from across Canada, and of these, 18 are Albertans.

Here in Alberta we are indeed fortunate to enjoy a supportive business and research climate which encourages innovators. The impact on the Alberta economy by innovators has been immense. This year's nominees include well-established innovators and start-up entrepreneurs. Some of these innovations are now being exported all over the world, and others are in the early stages of entering markets. They deserve our attention and recognition. They are the individuals who are changing the way Alberta and, indeed, Canada compete, manufacture, communicate, and care for each other.

I would ask the nominees to please rise as I call their names and remain standing until all are introduced. We begin with Adrian Banica from Edmonton, innovator of the realSens system, a helicopter-mounted remote gas-sensing instrument package; Wade Carson of Edmonton, Jim Colvin of Calgary, Andrew Czarnietzki of Edmonton, and Jonathan Klippenstein of Sherwood Park, innovators of the world's first snubbing simulator, a software training program – Jonathan Klippenstein was unable to join us today – Dale Gregg of Edmonton, innovator of the Handle-Tech hose and pipe handle; Kevin Grumetza of Thorhild, innovator of the Easy Sheet curling rink ice liner; Sean Hannigan of Edmonton, innovator of the Swift rig vac; Reza Nasser of Edmonton, innovator of the Landmark precision building system; Dennis Prince of Edmonton, innovator of Airdar, a new technology that measures the locations and sizes of emission sources; John Putters of Edmonton, innovator of WANDA, a washroom management system; Jason Dewling of Olds, innovator of the connect your passion initiative, a mobile learning strategy; Dennis Filips of Edmonton, innovator of the iTClamp, a small, lightweight temporary wound-closure device; Jerry Hanna of Sherwood Park, who invented the accelerated sediment removal technology; and Vern Sparkes of Calgary, innovator of the Ditch Hitch, a safe vehicle recovery device.

Mr. Speaker, there are three more 2014 nominees, who were unable to attend today. Ross Thurston of Calgary, innovator of LWR, a patented manure treatment system – his mother, Norma, attends in his stead – Jan Kowalczewski of Edmonton, innovator of ReJoyce, the rehabilitation joystick for computerized exercise; Dr. Ray Rajotte of Edmonton, innovator of the perfusion device for human islet isolation, a noninvasive transplant procedure freeing severe diabetics from insulin injections.

Mr. Speaker, I now ask all the members to join me in recognizing the 2014 Ernest C. Manning award nominees with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors, followed by the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests who are constituents of mine, Jerry and Katherine Hanna. Jerry, recognized a brief moment ago, is a made-in-Alberta innovator nominated for the Ernest C. Manning innovation award. His wife, Katherine, is a dynamic business leader in her own right and is on hand today to help celebrate her husband's success. I'd like to acknowledge the combined accomplishments of this couple, who are outstanding entrepreneurs and great supporters of our community in Strathcona county. Their many contributions include volunteering with the Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce and hosting an annual charity fundraiser at their home. I'm especially honoured to count Katherine and Jerry as friends. Jerry is in the Speaker's gallery today, of course, and Katherine is in the members' gallery. I would ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Wellness, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

1:40

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we are very pleased to have the HealthPartners group visiting the Legislature with one of their partner charities, the Kidney Foundation. HealthPartners is a unique collaboration of 16 of Canada's most trusted national health charities, representing 87 per cent of Canadians who are likely to be affected by chronic disease. Now, this crucial organization offers a convenient way for individuals to donate to health charities such as the Kidney Foundation in the workplace. I hope that all hon. members were able to take some time to visit the HealthPartners' kiosk located on the first floor of the Legislature rotunda earlier today to learn about the initiative. HealthPartners is an exemplary charity-based initiative, and I'm very proud to introduce one of its national board members, Leigh Allard. As you might know, Leigh does so many things, including serving as the president and CEO of the Lung Association for Alberta and the Northwest Territories. I would ask that she accept our very, very warm applause and welcome to our fine Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, you know how proud I am of all of the different agencies in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Today we have joining us some representatives, some ambassadors of Terra Centre. Terra serves teen parents in Edmonton, and as part of their service for young moms at Braemar school they are running a youth leadership ambassador program to instill confidence and give them opportunities. So here's one of their opportunities. Joining us today in the public gallery with the facilitator, Laura Barry-Johansen, we have – and please stand when I call your name – Reyane McDermott, Kerry-Ann Crossman, Mercedes Larocque, Kaylin Schick, Stephanie Attwell, Teesha Taylor, Michelle Martel,

Chantelle Gibbs. Laura, please rise. Please welcome these wonderful ambassadors to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the Minister of Justice.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an incredible advocate and someone I can now call a friend, Andrew McFadyen. Andrew is the founder of the Isaac Foundation, an organization that advocates for families and children affected by a debilitating disease called MPS. You'll recall the efforts last summer to get treatment for Aleena Sadownyk, an adorable four-year-old suffering from MPS. It was through the efforts of Andrew that the battle for the funding was won. Today Andrew has told me of another enzyme replacement therapy, that will be approved by Health Canada in June, which could greatly enrich the lives of six other Alberta children suffering from MPS. I know that the government won't hesitate in funding these children. I ask Andrew to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very distinguished Albertan, Dr. Allen Benson. Dr. Benson is the chief executive officer of Native Counselling Services of Alberta. I was pleased that today we announced a \$200,000 grant to Native Counselling Services to write Gladue reports. Dr. Benson is a graduate of the University of Alberta with an honorary doctor of laws. Along with Dr. Benson is Patti LaBoucane-Benson and Gabriel Benson as well as Dr. Curtis Clarke, my ADM for corrections. I'd ask them to all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of support staff from the seniors' Churchill residence run by Revera. Meseret Kifle, Rhonda Wolfe, and Kevin Tirimba are all members of the AUPE. They are among the roughly 70 workers, including LPNs, health care workers, housekeepers, cooks, and services, who are in negotiations with Revera. Sitting with them is the AUPE vice-president, Mike Dempsey. If they could now please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, allow me to please say congratulations to our Ernest Manning award winners and also to introduce some of the board members and other volunteers who are here: Sol Rolinger – if you would please stand – Jennifer Diakiw, and Bob Bowhay, northern Alberta chapter incoming vice-chair. Thank you, and congratulations to all of you on your hard work.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you know, we each have two minutes for these statements. Let's start with the Leader of Her

Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Wildrose revealed that AHS spent nearly \$1 billion – that's billion with a "b" – on sole-sourced untendered contracts in clear violation of its own contracting policies. This was a week after we revealed that AHS spent \$250 million on outside consultants in just 18 months. That works out to some \$460,000 every single day. Now, sole-source contracts might be great for the bureaucrats in charge because it means less work for them, but they're lousy for taxpayers. If AHS needs to be reminded, they deal in taxpayer dollars. It's their duty to get the best bang for the buck.

Speaking of which, Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight a few specific sole-source contracts that raised our eyebrows. You'll recall that last week we revealed that a former AHS VP was sole sourced a \$252,000 executive coaching contract the day after she left AHS with a million dollar pension. Pam Whitnack left AHS on August 31, 2011. She received the contract the very next day. Also, between August 2011 and January 2012 Spearhead Executive Coaching was handed \$88,000 for things like succession planning, capital management, and, of course, executive coaching. Now, who was an associate with Spearhead Executive Coaching? None other than Pam Whitnack. What a happy coincidence for the former AHS executive.

Mr. Speaker, you can see why we are so concerned with how AHS conducts itself. We have known for quite some time that health care wait times in Alberta lag behind the rest of Canada, and they're only getting worse. Meanwhile AHS is flushing hundreds of millions of dollars away in lucrative handouts for their former executives and outside consultants. The AHS bureaucracy is out of control, and patients are paying the price. What's worse, all we get from this government is spin and excuses.

AHS has failed, Mr. Speaker, and it's time for leadership that will put patients first.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Public-sector workers are the backbone of our hospitals, our schools, our communities. They are nurses, school aides, sheriffs, police officers, college teachers, garbage collectors. They are our front line, and we depend upon them.

Now, with no proof of a crisis, this PC government is renegeing on a promise made to generations of public-sector workers. Experts agree that Alberta's public pension plans are among the most stable in Canada. The proactive steps taken by the pension boards years ago will eliminate the unfunded liability within a dozen years. As is par for the course with this government, the minister is now advancing legislation that will allow him to drastically and unilaterally affect the pension benefits of thousands of Albertans.

He's made his plan very clear. He wants to reduce the cost-of-living adjustment so that pension benefits will not keep up with inflation. The retirement factor of age plus service will be raised from 85 to 90, forcing people to work longer. Anyone hoping to retire early will see their benefits severely penalized. Finally, he's aiming at a cap on contributions, which means that in future

economic downturns the plans may not be able to raise the money they need to maintain the benefits. It could result in the end of the defined pension benefit, and pensioners will no longer be able to count on any kind of reliable fixed income.

Take the example of an average worker with 25 years of service planning to retire at age 60 in 2030. He or she makes the average yearly salary of \$55,000. Under the changes that are proposed his monthly benefit would be just over \$1,300, a loss of \$241 a month. Mr. Speaker, living on a fixed income, we know that every single penny counts, and \$1,300 is not good enough.

These proposed changes will condemn people who have worked for the public sector to a retirement at or near the poverty line. The minister is calling it a compromise, but there's been no consultation with workers directly affected, and there's no negotiation, just more dictation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Three quick reminders: you have 35 seconds for each question, 35 seconds for each answer, and no preambles, please, after the fifth main question.

Also, I was asked to clarify the use of computers, laptops, that type of thing, and electronic devices. A memo is on your chair with respect to the procedural letter I sent to all of you on February 11. It has yellow highlighting. Please pay attention to it.

Let's start the clock, and let's start with Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader.

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we revealed even more waste at AHS. First it was \$250 million in outside consultants and now nearly a billion dollars in untendered contracts. Last week we showed that a former AHS VP, Pam Whitnack, was handed a \$250,000 executive coaching contract the day after she left AHS. This week we found out that another company, Spearhead Executive Coaching, received \$88,000 for the same services. And who is listed as a Spearhead associate? None other than Pam Whitnack. To the Premier: doesn't he see a problem here?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the opposition labelling things as waste and tossing it out like that doesn't actually make it so. In fact, the vast majority of the money that went out on sole-source contracts from Alberta Health Services went to suppliers of health services and care centres. The policies are in place. The Auditor General will audit to ensure that actions are carried out in accordance with policy. The vast majority of the resources that are used are used well. Can we do better? Obviously, we can.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Ms Whitnack must be the Vince Lombardi of executive coaches to keep on getting these sweetheart contracts. I'd say that she's more like the John Tortorella of executive coaches, coaching AHS executives out of their jobs all over the place. The bottom line is that there is no possible way to justify the spending of this kind of money when wait times are getting longer and patient outcomes are getting worse. To the Premier: is he is going to go over the head of this incompetent Health minister and get to the bottom of what is happening in AHS?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what we see day after day in this House is an opposition leader who does not respect the fact that people make a contribution day after day in this province. One of

the people that she's disrespecting is Pam Whitnack, who was the head of the Chinook health region for a number of years. The Chinook health region, as people may recall, was the health region that had the best example of primary care networks in the province and was renowned for some of the health service deliveries that it had. Now, I am not involved with Alberta Health Services in terms of why they hire people for executive coaching, but it does not become us to besmirch the character of people not in this House.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they gave her \$250,000 the day after they let her go from AHS. It can't be justified.

This Premier has been on the job less than a month, and his head-in-the-sand routine is already getting old. We know he won't be in the job very long, but that doesn't mean he can't make a difference. [interjection] Albertans are looking to him to show leadership and a determination to change his government's dismal performance of the last number of years. To the Premier: what is his legacy going to be, a placeholder and defender of PC failures or a champion of renewal in government?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've never been one to worry about my legacy, but I will say that my record will speak for itself. In case you missed the sotto voce voice of the leader of the ND opposition, he warned the Leader of the Opposition that if she scares too many people off, I might just last longer than she thinks.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Oh, Mr. Speaker, we can only hope.

Yesterday the Premier tried to downplay our revelations that AHS had a problem with sole-sourcing contracts by saying that the Auditor General thinks that's all fine. That's not what the Auditor General said. Let me quote from page 128 of his October report, recommendations that are still not dealt with. "We recommend that [AHS] develop and implement a sole-sourcing policy for contracts and ensure that sole sourcing is clearly documented and justified." Will the Premier admit that AHS is a disaster and lead the way in doing something about it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of our Minister of Health, who is one of the most competent Health ministers in the country and has a wealth of experience in the area, we are doing exactly that. We are making sure that Alberta Health Services deals with the issues it has. It's a large operation. It has had some difficulties in bringing 11 organizations together to serve Albertans better. It's well on its way to doing that. We can do better, and we will do better. But it won't be as a result of people pulling things out of the corners and waving them in the air. It will be as a result of thoughtful action taken by this minister, this government, and this Alberta health care system.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is more. The Auditor General did review some AHS transactions, as the Premier said. That was back in 2011. While he noted some progress, he wanted more. He said that without progress on this file "AHS will not have adequate support to justify sole-sourcing contracts." Now, the documents we released are for sole-source contracts in 2012 and 2013. Any reasonable person will look at this and know that there's a problem, or does the Premier think that sole sourcing contracts for fitness instructors, snow removal, and paper shredding is justified?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea how the executives in charge would justify doing those contracts, but I do know this.

There is a process. There is a policy. They are required to adhere to that process and policy, and they're held accountable against that process and policy not only by management, not only by this government, but by the Auditor General. The Auditor General has an ongoing review of sole-source contracts, as the hon. member has acknowledged. That process will continue. Obviously, Alberta Health Services knows that the Auditor General will be reporting on progress on a time-to-time basis, and they would obviously take that into account as they're managing their processes.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems offended that we ask questions about government spending and the waste of taxpayer dollars. Now, I will remind him that the Legislature has the power of the purse. Question period is the place where the executive is held to account for their decisions. When the cabinet wastes taxpayer money, we should all be offended. Will the Premier admit that after 43 years his government no longer cares about accountability and they've lost the moral authority to govern? [interjections]

Mr. Hancock: There is no one who cares more about fiscal accountability and responsibility than this government. This government puts taxpayer dollars first each and every day. I have never been offended by an appropriate question from the opposition or anyone else about my role and responsibility or about the government's role and responsibility in the process. [interjections] What I am offended by are people who misinterpret the facts, throw things up in the air, combine things that shouldn't be combined in order to create confusion and in order to create an expectation of waste when, in fact, there are appropriate processes in place to deal with accountability in an appropriate and understandable way.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, third set of questions.

Former Premier's Travel to Jasper

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's just test that premise put on the table by the Premier, shall we? Yesterday we asked for details on one of the Premier's taxpayer-funded trips. We want to know the details about any meetings the former Premier had with government officials in Jasper on the long weekend during last year's flood. Taxpayers paid for the Premier to get to and from Jasper. We paid for her security detail. We paid for her stay and her staff's stay at the luxury Jasper Park Lodge. Taxpayers have a right to know: what government business was conducted in Jasper that weekend?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the former Premier herself asked the Auditor General to look into the travel and expense policy, to review it, to see that it's robust enough, and to use the Premier's office as a sample in terms of determining how it's being followed. That process is in place. Any information that the Auditor General needs to do that review will be provided to them. That report presumably will be made available because he is an officer of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we have appropriate processes to look into things. It's not appropriate just to rise and make assumptions and aspersions and then try and believe that they're facts. Our policy is that planes are used for government business. That's our expectation.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am not asking the Premier to review every single item in the former Premier's calendar, just one weekend. I remember that weekend well. It was the weekend

when Albertans in my town and thousands of government workers, including a few cabinet ministers, were struggling to get the first of the residents of High River back into their homes. The former Premier was in Jasper. The documents say that it was for a meeting with government officials. Who did she meet with?

2:00

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if we're going to talk about what we remember, I can tell you that I as well remember the weekend well. On the Sunday of the long weekend I was in Calgary with my deputy minister and with a number of colleagues going to the three centres that we had set up in Calgary, with a number of public servants who were also there on their long weekends helping to hand out cards to people who were displaced by the floods. [interjections] A lot of work was being done by a lot of people. Now, some people were actually in other places in the province also doing work on the long weekend. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members it's getting difficult to hear the questions and the answers, and I'm going to ask you: please, let's be respectful of the questioner and the person answering.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have seen the RCMP called in to investigate federal politicians who improperly used taxpayer dollars for personal gain. If the former Premier really had meetings in Jasper, fine, but if there were no meetings, then we have a big problem. It's called breach of trust. Will the Premier clear the air and tell us who the former Premier met with in Jasper that weekend, or is he saying that we should take this to the RCMP for investigation?

Mr. Hancock: One of the things I know about our police in this province and this country, Mr. Speaker, is that they investigate criminal conduct that's brought to their attention. They do not just investigate aspersions, and they do not just investigate because somebody says that something might have happened. [interjections] So the appropriate process is for the Auditor General to review as he's been asked to do. He has access to all the information. If they have information otherwise, it's up to them to take it to the police if they believe so, but I can tell them right now that the police will not investigate just on their say-so. They'll have to have some actual evidence.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

FOIP Request Process

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exactly one year ago I made a statement that government sees all FOIP requests. The Health minister denied it, saying that it's an independent process, but Alberta Liberals have a FOIP showing that not only are there weekly FOIP status reports but that Executive Council co-ordinated Service Alberta's response to all our Liberal FOIPs. To the Premier, if FOIP is supposed to be an independent process, free of political interference, why isn't it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would believe that it is. Just because Executive Council – i.e., the head of the civil service in this province – reviews and creates a process whereby FOIP requests, that are the same FOIP requests that are provided to all departments, are co-ordinated and synchronized and the best use is made of public resources in terms of answering, that does not equate to political interference. Peter Watson is the chief deputy minister of this government, and it's his job to do the most

effective use of resources in responding to FOIP requests, as it is in other areas.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this Premier is in charge of Executive Council.

One of the main reasons for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is to make sure that access to government information is free from political interference. This government claims to have the gold standard of transparency. Well, let's find out. This Alberta Liberal FOIP reveals that there are weekly FOIP reports. So I'm curious, Premier, just exactly who sees these reports – you, your ministers, chiefs of staff, executive assistants, political staffers – and what do they do with this information?

Mr. Hancock: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's assumption is wrong. Just because I am the leader of the party and the Premier of the province does not mean that I interfere with everything that the civil service does. In fact, Peter Watson is the chief deputy minister of Executive Council, and it's his responsibility to make sure that all of government operations work well. [interjections] Now, by that member's suggestion, we could never, ever release a FOIP report because every minister is responsible for their department and the Premier is responsible for the rest of it. So you couldn't do any of that. [interjections] The fact of the matter is that it's set up appropriately, it works appropriately, and I don't see any of the weekly reports.

The Speaker: I'm sure the record will show several interjections because we actually have two microphones on the left walls, and two microphones over there. I think that's enough. Okay? Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Shocking. He's the Premier, and he doesn't know what his right-hand deputy is doing.

Mr. Speaker, opposition members and journalists can tell you how common it is to get the runaround, get delayed, or get responses that have large chunks deleted, which is a nice way of saying "censored." It's almost as if this government has its own frequent-flyer program when it comes to responding to the opposition and the media FOIPs. To the Premier: why is this government undermining the integrity and independence of the FOIP process by controlling what, how, and when we receive our responses?

Mr. Hancock: Well, the short answer is: it's not. The longer answer is that this hon. member is famous for bringing in his boxes and boxes of paper and no evidence. [interjections] Once again he's casting aspersions on a process and casting aspersions on the people who carry out that process, with no evidence whatsoever that anything wrong is happening. [interjections]

The fact of the matter is that we have a legislated FOIP process. That process is carried out appropriately. It's carried out by civil servants, and appropriate information is made available when that happens.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: I do have some of you listed for a question later, and I'd be remiss if I didn't remind you of that because I would hate to see somebody lose their question because you're speaking out of turn now. So be warned as of right now, okay? You know

who you are, and I'm not going to warn you again. All right? Thank you.

Let's go on, please, and be respectful. The leader of the ND opposition.

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the Premier knew he'd be left holding the baby, but he probably didn't think it would be twins.

Pensions are critical to our economy, crucial to keeping seniors healthy and out of poverty, and critical to attracting and retaining the quality staff we need for our public services. To the Premier: will you stop pretending that you are trying to protect the pensions of public employees and stop the unnecessary attack on the pensions, which do so much for our economy, for seniors' health, and for our public services?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dallas: Well, hon. member, I think a review of what the Auditor General has said with respect to this is significant. You know that he conducted a review, that the report was released on February 13. It's clear that there needs to be recognition of some simple facts, the facts around the ratio of those contributing to the plan to those collecting from the plan and the mortality rates that have changed. Of course, there are a number of other factors. Simply, the time is now to address these problems in a very modest and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister is pretending that the Auditor General has endorsed these changes, and that's just not true. Alberta Health Services used George & Bell, the same actuary that projected that pensions would be fully funded within 10 years, for a report on managing a legacy fund, so they think they're credible. Yet this government isn't listening to those experts. In fact, they won't even negotiate with the hundreds of thousands of their own employees, who stand to lose hundreds of dollars a month from their retirement income. To the Premier: why won't you listen to the responsible experts who say that these plans will be fully funded even if you don't make any changes at all?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member references a study by George & Bell, and the problem with that particular study is the methodology. The forecast projected in the study, the numbers that were likely chosen by the proponent of the study, indicated that the assumption would be that the assets would earn at least 5.75 per cent every year from now until 2023 and that there would be no other unexpected cost pressures. Those numbers simply are not appropriate for a study of this kind.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, employees and the unions that represent them, the plan boards themselves are willing to negotiate on changes to the pensions. It's just this government that refuses to negotiate, just like when they tried to freeze the wages of their own employees. Mr. Premier: will you please show good faith with the Albertans that work hard to

provide our public services and go back to the negotiating table and talk to them about these changes? Why don't you negotiate instead of legislating?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the consultation process behind this particular change has been fairly long. It was the middle of 2012 when the Provincial Treasurer went out to talk to the pension boards and others about what was needed to ensure that we had a sustainable pension plan so we could keep our pension promise to public servants. Throughout 2012 and into 2013 that discussion took place. In 2013 the Provincial Treasurer tabled some proposed changes to the pension plan for discussion, and that was open for discussion till December 2013. He then took the feedback that he got from that and built it into the response.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Seniors' Housing for Couples

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, many residents in my constituency have parents living in seniors' housing elsewhere in the city and throughout the province. I've heard concerns regarding divorce through separation. My constituents feel that there are parents that are suffering. Albertans that built the province we love must travel long distances to visit their most loved family members. It is important to quality of life to try and keep these couples together. To the Associate Minister of Seniors: as recipients of Alberta seniors' benefits do not qualify for Calgary senior citizens' transit passes or a reduced rate, is there some way that the province can help these individuals?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, thank you. With respect to couples in seniors' housing our government, of course, has built up to 5,000 accommodation spaces in the last five years. Part of the design of these new buildings is that all of them have couple suites in them. They're around the province, of course. That is the end goal, actually, that instead of these folks having to move around with transit, they would actually be in the same facility. In some cases the different levels of care are drastically different, and it can't always be accommodated.

Mr. Webber: Minister, there are many seniors who are separated, and it's a disgrace.

Given that transportation is only part of this issue, what actual steps is the government taking to allow most of our vulnerable citizens the dignity of aging in the communities that they have helped build?

Mr. Quest: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, very specifically, the bricks-and-mortar part of it is that there are, in fact, new facilities being built all over Alberta that are being funded by the province or in partnership with not-for-profits or faith based. Also, in those facilities there are multiple levels of care. If one spouse requires a very high level of care, perhaps dementia or something of that nature, and the other one requires a lower level of care, they can be accommodated in the same facility. We are working towards that right now.

With respect to the transit question that the hon. member brought up earlier, there is an AHS volunteer services area on their website.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Webber: To the same minister: will your ministry change its current mandate and make the reuniting of these couples a priority?

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any mandate to be changed. We have the bricks and mortar and thousands of spaces around the province now, with plans, again, to meet our commitment to build the next 2,000 around the province, and part of that will be an increase in couples' accommodations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we revealed that in two years AHS sole-sourced \$1 billion in contracts. The Premier said that this was somehow all okay because it might have complied with policy. He missed the point. Gifting a billion dollars in contracts is not in the best interest of taxpayers. If tendering these saved only 1 per cent, that's an extra \$100 million. That would pay for 300 hip surgeries, 300 knee surgeries, and 100 heart surgeries. It's not just about waste; it's about getting dollars to the front line. Why doesn't the government do something about it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there's a very clear policy in place. Alberta Health Services has thresholds for any contracts over \$75,000 for goods and services and any contracts over \$200,000 for construction contracts. Exemptions include: only one supplier can provide the service when no other supplier is qualified or an unforeseen situation of urgency exists; the subject matter, the procurement, is of a confidential and privileged nature; or an RFP or other competitive process has resulted in no proposals or bids.

The point is that they manage these contracts. They're supposed to be managing them in an appropriate way, and the Auditor General will determine whether or not they have . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. He walked into that one.

Given that cab companies, couriers, and even Coca-Cola were all handed untendered contracts and given that all of these companies clearly have competitors that could have bid against them for deals – I personally like Pepsi – will the Premier admit that a policy that doesn't require an attempt to get the best deal for taxpayers is a policy that clearly needs to be changed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, from the questions and answers that have happened in the House over the last few days, a number of things are clear: first of all, that there is a policy in place; secondly, that the Auditor General over the course of a number of reviews has been reviewing that policy and has been providing advice to Alberta Health Services with respect to what they need to do. It's also clear that the Auditor General has sampled contracts from time to time – there's at least one instance that I understand took place – and has indicated that the contracts met the policy at that time. This hon. member could go back and pick something and talk about what brand of pop she likes, but the fact of the matter is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second and final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What's clear, Premier, is that you're not following your own policy.

Given that when we revealed that a former AHS VP was gifted a \$250,000 consulting contract the day after she resigned, the Minister of Health assured the House that he'd inquire with the AHS official administrator about the situation and it's a week later and we haven't heard anything, how can Albertans believe this government has any concern for the consistent abuse of taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans can be assured of is that this government clearly has at its forefront the respect for every taxpayer dollar. We operate a budget of approximately \$42 billion on a day-to-day basis. That is important work. That's important work in Health Services; that's important work in the other jurisdictions and other aspects of government. The hon. minister has indicated he will go back and have a look at that particular contract, but that is a contract that has been in place already. We are taking care of the public's dollars on a day-to-day basis. We have processes in place to make sure that there isn't waste, and we constantly strive to improve through our results-based budgeting.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Marigold Library System Funding

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Marigold library system provides library services to 41 municipalities and 260,000 residents in south-central Alberta, including the fast-growing communities of Airdrie, Cochrane, High River, Okotoks, and Strathmore. It's currently receiving its per capita funding based on 2010 population numbers. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given the rapid population growth in those areas, why are the 2010 figures being used to calculate library grants?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really happy to receive this question. We've been very committed to our libraries. Even though over the last two or three years we've seen some challenges in our budgets, we've committed, we've held the line, and we've kept funding for our libraries at \$26 million for operating. That isn't all we provide to libraries. We provide interlibrary loan services, the provincial library network. We also provide electronic content, resources for the print disabled, and improved high-speed Internet services. We are trying to support our libraries as best we can.

Dr. Brown: Looking forward, what does the minister intend to do to ensure that the library grant funding matches the current population growth, which is now depriving that system of about a hundred thousand dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, public libraries are incredibly important in our communities, especially in rural Alberta, where in many of our smaller communities it is the centre of the municipality. Right now if we were to try to increase the dollars to match population, it would be a million and a half dollars this year and half a million dollars every year to keep up with that. We'll continue to look at how we can do that. Libraries are funded in a partnership with our municipalities, so we'll continue to work with them to ensure that

library services are available and that libraries continue to be the centre of our communities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I see there is no second supplemental, so let's move on.

Highway Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, after receiving complaints regarding highway maintenance, a FOIP request proved that out of six highway maintenance contractors one, known as Carillion, has been charged with the most penalties, 195 times, in fact, over the 2008 to 2012 period. Despite this terribly poor record, Carillion Canada was given a new 10-year contract by Alberta Transportation in 2012, worth approximately \$450 million. Can the minister responsible for this decision tell the people of Alberta why you rewarded such a poor performer with a 10-year contract?

2:20

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the minister is not here today, but he has told me that he is reviewing all the contracts. I'll take this under advisement and get an answer to the member.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. Considering that four other contractors each had less than 20 fines during the same period that Carillion received 195, will Alberta Transportation continue to consider bids from this company when new highway contracts in other areas of Alberta go to tender this year?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only assume in the criteria for the letting of these important contracts that the safety aspect of road maintenance for all Albertans is critically important. I'm sure the criteria goes well beyond the exceptions that the member acknowledges. We'll be happy to bring this forward to the minister.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that Carillion obviously has been known for continuing to fail to provide acceptable levels of performance in the past, will the minister then please describe what performance measures and steps will be used to ensure this contractor completes future tasks in an appropriate and fully satisfactory manner?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the minister would be more than happy to discuss with the member the criteria for the letting of these maintenance contracts. There is absolutely a robust series of criteria that is utilized to make these important selections. Safety is the number one priority. Obviously, the importance of our roads for all Albertans for market access goes without saying.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Please be reminded not to refer to the absence or presence of members.

Let's go on. Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

FOIP Request Process

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It is very difficult and consuming of time and money to pry information out of this government. Now, I've always suspected that requests from

media and opposition were treated differently, and look what we found: government e-mails showing that Liberal FOIPs were intercepted by a deputy minister, then run through a committee for discussion, and then sent to cabinet for consultations. To the Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: why did Executive Council, the Premier's office and cabinet, bend or break the rules of the FOIP Act?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that this government has an excellent record of responding to FOIP requests. [interjections] In 2010 and 2011 we responded to more than 4,200 FOIP requests; 90 per cent of those requests were responded to within 30 days, and 96 per cent of those requests were responded to within 60 days. We have an excellent record responding to FOIP requests. [interjections]

Ms Blakeman: That doesn't mean you didn't interfere.

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's have your first supplemental.

Could the rest of us please give her the floor without the yelling and the outbursts that we just heard? Please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I can feel the attention.

Back to the same minister: given that in the definitions of FOIP a third party is a group other than government, why were we told that another 30 days were needed to consult a third party when it was Executive Council which was being consulted?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct an assumption that was made by this hon. member in her first question, and that is that cabinet sees FOIP requests. I want to assure her that cabinet does not see FOIP requests. FOIP requests are handled under the provisions that are set out in the act and handled appropriately. When it refers to Executive Council, it obviously refers to the chief deputy minister, who co-ordinates the activities of other civil servants in appropriately responding to FOIP requests.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry; that's just not what it says.

Back to the Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: was the permission sought of the commissioner of freedom of information to allow extending time for multiple questions? That one would have been legit. Did you try it?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the hon. member is asking for. We do have a good record. There is a procedure in the act that can be followed. Section 65 of the act provides a procedure that any person who makes a request under FOIP can go to the commissioner and follow up, and the commissioner has the power to investigate and take other measures under the act. There is an effective piece of legislation, and there are procedures that can be used under that legislation.

School Infrastructure Priorities

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this week some Edmonton parents got the bad news that they have to sacrifice three community schools, shutting the doors forever, just to get one new school from this government. But while children in Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods are losing schools, this government is spending \$7 million expanding Prairie Christian Academy, a school with discriminatory codes of conduct, where enrolment isn't even growing. To the Premier: will you tell Albertans why public schools are being closed while schools like PCA are getting more dollars?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in urban centres we have a problem with growth in the suburbs and requiring more schools there, but we have a lot of schools that no longer have the students they need to have a viable educational program. It makes sense to take three old schools out of circulation but to provide one new school with current, viable, and up-to-date equipment and a site for good learning opportunities for those students.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that this PC government is dictating an arbitrary 3 to 1 policy, forcing school boards to close at least three schools to get one new one, ignoring local community needs such as demographics, student needs, and geography and given that, on the other hand, when it comes to ignoring universal human rights, you people can't defer to boards fast enough, to the Premier: why are you being so hypocritical?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, school boards determine what their priorities are, but we do want to make sure that school boards use resources in appropriate ways. It's very difficult to use educational resources in an appropriate way if you have to heat old buildings that are only half or a quarter or 20 per cent full. When you can't provide proper educational programming in that circumstance, it just makes sense to take old buildings out of circulation. But we do need to, when we do that, provide the proper educational experience and educational site in those areas, and that's precisely what the policy does.

Mr. Bilous: You should apply that to old governing parties.

Mr. Speaker, given that it's this PC government that decides how much funding our school boards get and given that it's this PC government that's allowed deferred maintenance in our schools to grow and grow and grow, back to the Premier: will you admit that your PC government's failure is forcing school boards to close mature neighbourhood schools?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the experience of school boards that have old buildings is that they cannot keep those buildings open without devoting an awful lot of educational resources to doing so. It makes sense at some point in time, when we don't build a new school on every block today, to go back into those neighbourhoods and say: how can we create the right kind of educational opportunity for those students, take those buildings out of play that are no longer viable or valuable, but make sure that those students have a place to go to school in and near their neighbourhood?

PDD Supports Intensity Scale

Mrs. Towle: According to the 2009 annual report the supports intensity scale, or SIS, is used to determine individual support needs and to develop service plans for individuals in the PDD system. Last year we heard the previous minister of PDD explain how effective and important this tool was. We now have a new minister, who has been travelling the province once again to hear from clients and those impacted by SIS assessments. Can the associate minister for persons with developmental disabilities provide Albertans with his assessment of SIS and its effectiveness in determining need and funding?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. SIS is only one of the tools which is used to establish just a baseline of the needs of the individual. There's a philosophical difference between asset based or needs based. We have chosen to take the

needs of the individuals, their goals, and their aspirations and meet those needs. That's what SIS is all about.

Mrs. Towle: Given that on April 3 the associate minister addressed the Alberta Disabilities Forum and expressed that he has heard multiple concerns from families and service providers around the flaws of the supports intensity scale, which is exactly what the previous minister heard as well, and given that at that same forum the minister himself agreed that SIS does not work, can the minister tell families and organizations what he is going to do about a program that he himself admits doesn't even work?

2:30

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, SIS is one of the tools. When I travel the province and talk to a number of different families, the impact of the SIS and having challenges with the SIS – we have a focus group who is going to be travelling the province, meeting the individuals and the families who want to be reassessed. We're going to be meeting the needs of those individuals. The forum she's talking about: yes, I did acknowledge that there are people who are asking to be reassessed. We're absolutely going to be meeting the needs of those individuals.

Mrs. Towle: Great. So we're going to spend more money on the same focus groups the previous minister already spent money on.

Given that on April 3 this minister said that the supports intensity scale doesn't work and that the previous minister already did his focus groups all last year and heard that SIS does not work and that families and service providers have repeatedly said that SIS doesn't work, how can the minister possibly assure vulnerable Albertans and their families they will receive the support that they require if the very system they're using to assess them doesn't work?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, I have never said that the system does not work. What I have said is that part of the PDD transformation is about meeting the needs of the individuals: their needs, their goals, their aspirations. SIS is one of the tools which is used right across the province to have a consistent approach to providing services to the most vulnerable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Highwood.

Calgary Aging in Place Initiative

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Responding to the rising needs of seniors, we in Calgary-Hawkwood have launched the aging in place pilot. This pilot focuses on a continuum of services to keep seniors living in our community. It includes soft services such as snow shovelling, grocery shopping, doctors' appointments, and also infrastructure support such as assisted housing arrangements. The pilot will utilize a community-based model to encourage people to take part in decisions that impact their future. My question is to the hon. Associate Minister of Seniors. Given the competing demands in this area, is there . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the people of the Calgary-Hawkwood constituency and, of course, this hon. member for starting this pilot project, that's dedicated to helping seniors to thrive and stay in their communities. He's

talking about soft services. I know where he's going. The government is committed to providing supports and care options to help seniors age in place. As a matter of fact, we have the strongest seniors' supports in Canada, including the special-needs assistance program and the property tax deferral program, which could perhaps be helpful in this case. It's a pilot project, as the member said, and we look forward to working with those folks and finding out how it's gone.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Luan: Thank you. To the same minister: given that a community grassroots program like this one will benefit a great deal from professional facilitation, if no money is clearly identified for such a program, can you offer some support from an HR point of view?

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I say, it's a pilot program, so this is all open to discussion. Volunteers like the community members in this project have given generously of their time and their talent. We very much appreciate that. Again, we look forward to working with them. Soft services is an area that we need to get some work done in because it is all part of our strategy to help seniors age in place. Having some options for seniors for those services is all part of that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Luan: Last but not least, if the minister is unable to promise any specific dollars or people, can you at least commit yourself to coming to the aging in place community fair that we will be hosting on Saturday, October 4, 2014, so that you can learn from those fantastic volunteers what they are intending to do and how you can help them?

Mr. Quest: Well, I'd like to learn more about what they're doing, Mr. Speaker. That sounds like a good opportunity to do that. Perhaps we can, hopefully, have an opportunity to sit down and chat about how it's going before then. But if there's an event on that day, schedule permitting, I'd love to be there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by St. Albert.

Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre Parking

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question to ask the Wellness minister on behalf of my constituents. In July 2006 Alberta Health Services was given a report, conducted on their behalf, regarding the use of the Okotoks health and wellness centre. It identified a growing need to increase the number of parking stalls available for both staff and visitors. Although Okotoks has seen remarkable growth since that time, nothing has been done to increase parking at the site. Can the minister tell my constituents what plans are in place to improve access to this important community facility?

Mr. Rodney: Well, I would personally like to thank the opposition leader for bringing up wellness. It's, I believe, the first time in two years that we've had a question from the opposition. I just kind of wonder where it's been on their priority list. I would expect that she agrees that we want to do everything that we can to be positive, proactive, preventative in our programs and policies. I'm happy to look into this exact file.

The Speaker: First sup.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that in this same report it was identified that urgent care, located in the Okotoks health and wellness centre, sees over 75 patients a day and given that patients going to the medical laboratory, family resource centre, and other community health and wellness services adds hundreds and hundreds of people a day at the facility and they need parking, can the minister indicate when new parking stalls will be made available at the Okotoks health and wellness centre?

Mr. Rodney: Having been to the fine facility on more than one occasion and seeing the great work that the great people do there, I am very happy to do what I can to see that they have what they need. I'm happy to discuss this, as mentioned, with the Health minister, and we will get back to you.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. They did have another suggestion. The Healthy Okotoks Coalition has written a number of letters to both the Health minister and AHS executives, unfortunately to no avail, but they have prepared a proposal that would have qualified volunteers remove sod and make a gravel parking lot at the Okotoks health and wellness centre. Will the minister commit to immediately addressing the parking needs at this facility, or will he give these volunteers permission to do the work themselves?

Mr. Rodney: Well, as mentioned in my previous answer, I'm very happy to talk to the Health minister. I kind of wish that I had seen a copy of that. But let's face it: my bailiwick is to do with programs and policies that are really about keeping people happy, healthy, and out of the hospital as much as possible, to increase the quality of life for Albertans while decreasing health care taxes and costs, and I know that we would agree on that. As mentioned, I am happy to bring this up with the Health minister in the next week.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Shawna Rodnunsky is a constituent of mine in St. Albert. Dr. Rodnunsky has visited my office a number of times to raise awareness and voice her concerns to me regarding supports for patients with chronic fatigue syndrome. CFS is a physical illness that makes those who suffer from this condition debilitated and unable to do all normal daily activities. To the Associate Minister of Wellness: what services, treatments, or supports are available in Alberta to help those diagnosed with CFS?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his advocacy on this very personal and, obviously, very important issue not just for the person in question but for others across Alberta. I believe that he knows that our government recognizes that chronic fatigue syndrome is a complex health issue and that it has debilitating effects on those who suffer from it. As with most chronic illnesses we truly appreciate that our primary health care providers, our family physicians and our practitioners, are those in the best position to provide care for Albertans across the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the current understanding of chronic fatigue syndrome is, as the minister points out, still very limited, will your ministry work with health care professionals to expand the awareness, diagnosis, and treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome and related conditions?

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to share with the hon. member that our government is currently working closely with Alberta Health Services to improve chronic health disease management and to improve province-wide best practices in this area. Along with the Health ministry and AHS we'll continue to look to new research not just across the country but around the world. It's a similar approach that's led to success in many other areas. As we continue to learn more about CFS, we'll continue to work with our partners to not only raise awareness based on best information available but to apply it as well.

Mr. Khan: Well, thank you for that, Mr. Minister. To the same minister again: given that chronic fatigue syndrome is, as he points out, a complicated disorder and many patients are desperately in need of care, will your ministry allocate more resources to help those diagnosed with CFS?

2:40

Mr. Rodney: Another great question. I can tell the member and the people of the province that our government is very strongly focused on improving access to primary health care services for Albertans and helping more people to manage chronic diseases and illnesses within their communities. That's why I really want to take the opportunity to thank those that are on the front line. They're really in the best position and are the main publicly funded supports available to assist all those who are coping with CFS and other chronic diseases across Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that I will take his questions and suggestions forward to the Minister of Health.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will continue with private members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, she was only three years old. She was just a toddler. That was how old my Armenian grandmother was when she was taken from her mother's arms. It was her good neighbours, her Turkish neighbours, who offered to say that she was their daughter and to care for her as their own. They said that she was too little to keep quiet when her family had to hide, and they would keep her safe until her family returned.

The 99th commemoration of the Armenian genocide will take place on Thursday, April 24 around the world. You probably won't read about it in the newspapers, yet what was done to Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 marked the first genocide of the 20th century. A genocide denied is a genocide repeated, and, oh, how we have repeated the horror of this statement. The international community failed to hold the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide accountable for their crimes, and this has encouraged crimes against humanity,

including the Jewish holocaust, the Ukrainian Holodomor, Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur, and now Syria.

Mr. Speaker, denial prevents healing. I quote from the dissertation by Ashley Kalagian Blunt that I will table today.

The global recognition and remembrance of the Armenian genocide is an issue that has personal significance for Armenians as well as political significance for the world community... In light of this, it seems imperative for Armenians to continue to advocate for genocide recognition and Turkish admittance of responsibility.

On April 21, 2004, our Canadian government officially recognized the Armenian genocide. This is a monumental step towards eliminating future genocides, but it is not enough. As long as nations in the world continue to deny genocides and accept alterations to the facts of history, we will continue to face systematic annihilations of entire cultures.

Hope does survive, Mr. Speaker, because of loving and kind people like the Turkish family that saved my grandmother, Mariam Kalagian, and taught her that love is better than hate.

I call upon the Turkish government to recognize the Armenian genocide and to stop trying to alter the historical...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Peace Wapiti School Division

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to talk about a school in one of my communities called Teepee Creek and talk about their school board a little bit, the Peace Wapiti school division. Teepee Creek is a small farming community approximately 50 kilometres from Grande Prairie to the northwest. This small rural school hosts approximately 80 students ranging from kindergarten all the way through to grade 8, with five classrooms, a gymnasium, a computer room, and a library.

This is the oldest school in the Peace Wapiti school board, and it was built in 1955. This school is one of the 70 schools recently approved for modernization, which has already begun. This school also offers specialty programs, including counselling, early literacy, intervention, speech pathology services, an individual classroom project program, as well as swimming programs.

The Peace Wapiti school division consists of more than 5,600 students in 32 schools. Peace Wapiti school board's mandate states that it is "responsible for the provision and maintenance of an educational environment that enables all students to achieve their potential to become productive members of a changing society."

Both the Teepee Creek school and the Peace Wapiti public school board have huge impacts on the residents in these communities and the surrounding area. These organizations enrich individuals and allow them to fulfill themselves. My constituents are blessed to host these organizations, and I wish them the best in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Deaths of Calgary Students

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past I've always been pleased to rise and report on what is happening in my constituency of Calgary-Varsity. I never dreamed that I would ever have to rise and speak on such a senseless tragedy as we have

endured this week. Yesterday residents of Brentwood awoke to a nightmare. Five young people had been murdered while celebrating the end of their semester at the University of Calgary. Lawrence Hong, Josh Hunter, Kaitlin Perras, Zackariah Rathwell, and Jordan Segura all had their dreams, futures, and lives brutally torn away by a horrific act of violence. As a mother with a son currently attending university, I can only imagine the heartbreak their parents are feeling.

I know that all members in this House join in offering our condolences and deepest sorrows to their families and to their loved ones. Ever since Calgary-Varsity was formed in 1993, students and seniors have lived side by side, one generation supporting the other. Students and seniors are the heart and soul of our constituency. Students are our future. They embody our dreams for a better Alberta. Five sets of dreams have been forever silenced this week, and the sadness of this act will weigh on our hearts for a very long time. It has diminished our community and our city.

It's natural to ask how someone could lash out in such anger and also how we can keep ourselves and our communities safe from such hatred. Such answers to these questions will come as the investigation proceeds, and others will need much more reflection.

What we can do right now is to be proud of the University of Calgary's compassionate response. We can be grateful for the effective and determined response of the Calgary Police Service in swiftly apprehending the suspect. Lastly, we can be confident in the ability of our city and community to come together and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Highway Construction and Maintenance

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, through the process of discussing the budget for the Ministry of Transportation, the overriding resulting impression was that this so vital a department to our province is sadly far behind in terms of existing infrastructure, maintenance, and expansion plus that the department severely lacks the ability to address the immense long-term deficit in highway construction projects that need to be completed. From the north end of Alberta, where our heavy industries need better access routes and infrastructure to deliver their components for the construction of their facilities, to the southern region, where the main routes out of the province are so severely constricted that their size and conditions limit our abilities to easily ship our products, the main transportation corridors need enhancements immediately to prevent the further decline of our ability to properly and safely participate in world trade.

In terms of maintenance, according to the Transportation business plan of '14-17, the physical condition of provincial highway services is far below reasonable expectations, where fewer than 59 per cent are in good condition, fewer than 27 per cent are in fair condition, and over 15 per cent are in poor condition.

Regarding key postponed construction projects, the twinning of highway 3, for example, which is the southern major transportation corridor to the border and to the shipping terminals at the coast in B.C., that was confirmed to be a bottleneck type of problem, that was confirmed to be constructed by the Premier of this province in 2007, has been studied, designed, yet it has been ignored.

Mr. Speaker, considering all of the above, it is hard to understand how a province with the highest revenue in Canada cannot adequately fulfill their obligations to maintain our highway and road network and address this enormous infrastructure deficit. Yet this same ministry claims that it provides a world-class transportation system that supports Alberta's economy and quality of life. Really?

Not according to the facts as we in the public see it.

Thank you.

2:50

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2).

- (1) the petition of Dr. Lyle Oberg and Dr. Terrence H. White, directors of the Rosebud School of the Arts, for the Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014.
- (2) the petition of Patricia Goodwill-Littlechild, executive director of Maskwachees Cultural College, and Dennis Callihoo, legal counsel for Maskwachees Cultural College, for the Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister and International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance I'm pleased to rise today and introduce Bill 9, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, public-sector pension plans, like many across North America, face serious challenges. People are collecting pensions for longer while the number of retirees is rising, causing a bigger cost burden to fall on active plan members. The situation is further compounded by continuing low interest rates expected to trend in future years. The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance as the trustee of these plans has a fiduciary duty to plan members and to taxpayers. The proposed changes in the bill strike the right balance between all stakeholders. By acting now with some modest course corrections, we avoid leaving future generations of plan members and taxpayers with significant problems to deal with later.

The Speaker: Did I hear you move first reading?

Mr. Dallas: Yes.

The Speaker: I think I did.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Bill 10

Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance I'm pleased

to rise today and introduce Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will affect pension plans offered in the private sector and should not be confused with the work we are doing on public-sector sustainability in Bill 9. What the employment pension plans amendment act will do is permit defined benefit pension plans in the private sector to convert previously accrued defined benefits into target benefits as well as also address some required housekeeping changes. By allowing these proposed changes, we will be helping private employers address some of the challenges they are facing, including pension plans that are too costly to maintain. In an era when pension plan coverage is very low, legislation should be aimed at encouraging those who have pension plans to continue to do so. This amendment will contribute to that goal.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Your first of two.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is copies of a petition with approximately 2,000 signatures from the Alberta Federation of Labour. The petition is gaining hundreds of signatures every day and is calling on the government to pass legislation that will ensure that any changes to the LAPP or the PSPP are the result of direct negotiations between the government and the affected employees.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is 50 of over 4,000 postcards that our office has received asking the PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, are clear evidence that the government needs to listen to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system which is accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a dissertation written by my niece Ashley Kalagian Blunt as part of her master's degree in cultural studies at the University of Sydney. The dissertation states that

nearly one hundred years have passed since the Armenian genocide, which prefaced and in some ways encouraged the Holocaust – yet the Turkish government continues to deny the genocide and uses political manipulation to prevent its recognition by other nations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition or someone on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the leader of the Liberal opposition I table copies of *Hansard* from April 16, 2013, which he referenced during his questions this afternoon.

May I continue with my own tablings? Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I also have the appropriate number of copies of a selection, I believe, of documents that we received from a FOIP, including

ones that talk about: “Executive Council (EC) did request the ARTS Lists are to be sent over after your consultation with Legal Counsel.” There are a number of other references where they talk about deputy ministers being involved or getting the approval of cabinet or getting the consultation of Executive Council.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Swann: I have the appropriate number of copies of a tabling from the Ministry of Energy in Ontario called Creating Cleaner Air in Ontario. Ontario is now the first jurisdiction in North America to fully eliminate coal as a source of electricity generation. The minister had this to say.

Getting off coal is the single largest climate change initiative undertaken in North America and is equivalent to taking up to seven million cars off the road. Today we celebrate a cleaner future for our children and grandchildren while embracing the environmental benefits that our cleaner energy sources will bring.

Signed by Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Energy.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of Dr. Sherman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, a letter dated April 7, 2014, from Dr. Sherman, leader of the Liberal opposition, to Merwan Saher, Auditor General, requesting an investigation regarding the circumstances surrounding all contracts awarded by the government of Alberta to Navigator Ltd. since 2008.

Statement by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day Program

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. We have no points of order today, but I'd like to draw to your attention the MLA for a Day program. I've received notes from some of you yesterday and today. As you know, the cut-off was Monday, but there were some hiccups with some of the machines, so I've spoken with the Sergeant-at-Arms and visitor services, and the deadline has been extended only to the end of today. We have just over 70 representatives. It takes a lot to co-ordinate this, so please if you have anyone interested, let me or the Sergeant-at-Arms know before the end of day today. Thank you very much for your support.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would now like to call the committee to order.

Prior to beginning, the chair will outline the process for this afternoon. The Committee of Supply will first call on the chairs of the legislative policy committees to report on their meetings with the various ministries under their mandate. No vote is required when these reports are presented according to Standing Order 59.01(10).

Members are reminded that there were amendments introduced during the legislative policy committee meetings, so the committee will vote on all proposed amendments.

The committee will then proceed to the vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. The vote on the main estimates will then take place.

The estimates of two ministries will then be voted on separately pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) in accordance with notice provided by the Liberal opposition House leader to the Clerk on April 15, 2014. The final vote on the main estimates will consist of any ministries not yet voted upon.

Finally, the chair would like to remind all hon. members of Standing Order 32(3.1), which provides that after the first division is called in Committee of Supply during the vote on the main estimates, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent division.

Committee Reports

The Deputy Chair: I would now like to invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future to present the committee's report.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2014-15 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: Executive Council, two hours; the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; the Ministry of Infrastructure; the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education; the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations; the Ministry of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour; the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Madam Chair, I would like to table amendments to the following ministries that were introduced during the meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: Executive Council, one amendment; the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations, one amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I would now like to call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities to present the committee's report.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2014-15 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Human Services, the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, the Ministry of Service Alberta.

I'd also like to table amendments to the following ministries that were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: the Ministry of Service Alberta, one amendment; the Ministry of Human Services, one amendment; and the Ministry of Health, one amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Now the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I'm pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2014-15 proposed estimates and business plans for

the following ministries: the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance.

I'd also like to table amendments to the following ministries that were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: the Ministry of Energy, one amendment; the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, one amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Vote on Main Estimates 2014-15

The Deputy Chair: The next item of business is the vote on the amendments introduced during the legislative policy committee meetings. There are a total of seven amendments, and they will be identified as amendments A1 to A7. Members have received copies of all the amendments on their desks. We will begin with A1 and carry on in sequence.

A1. Mr. Mason moved that the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 66 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Ministry of Energy be reduced by \$250,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 65 for operational is \$427,147,000.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

A2. Mr. Mason moved that the estimates for the office of the Premier/Executive Council under reference 1.1 at page 94 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Executive Council be reduced by \$911,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 93 for operational is \$47,486,000.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, are we allowed to speak to these amendments?

The Deputy Chair: There is no debate on these amendments. Thank you.

A3. Mr. Eggen moved that the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 100 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Ministry of Health be reduced by \$561,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 99 for operational is \$18,246,948,000.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

A4. Ms Notley moved that the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 112 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Ministry of Human Services be reduced by \$673,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 111 for operational is \$4,088,295,000.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

A5. Mr. Mason moved that the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 144 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations be reduced by \$250,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 143 for operational is \$39,160,000.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

A6. Mr. Bilous moved that the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 172 of the

2014-15 main estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs be reduced by \$286,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 171 for operational is \$422,949,000.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

A7. Mr. Eggen moved that the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 190 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta be reduced by \$260,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 189 for operational is \$295,223,000.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the following question on all matters relating to the 2014-15 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.

Agreed to:
Offices of the Legislative Assembly \$128,313,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

We shall now proceed to the vote on the estimates of the two ministries which will be voted on separately pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) and in accordance with notice provided by the Liberal opposition House leader to the Clerk on April 15, 2014.

Agreed to:
Aboriginal Relations
Operational \$205,861,000
Capital \$25,000
Financial Transactions \$96,161,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Agriculture and Rural Development
Operational \$632,769,000
Capital \$28,196,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

We shall now proceed to the final vote on the main estimates. Those members in favour of the remaining resolutions for the 2014-15 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.
Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

I would now invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2014-15 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2014-15 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund.

3:10

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report the 2014-2015 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2014-15 government estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2014-2015 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2014-2015 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly.
Support to the Legislative Assembly, \$69,415,000; office of the Auditor General, \$27,300,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$3,349,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$6,517,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$973,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$6,983,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$12,502,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$1,274,000.

The government main estimates.
Aboriginal Relations: operational, \$205,861,000; capital, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$96,161,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: operational, \$632,769,000; capital, \$28,196,000.

Culture: operational, \$157,473,000; capital, \$48,800,000; financial transactions, \$2,370,000.

Education: operational, \$4,238,760,000; capital, \$666,862,000; financial transactions, \$11,924,000.

Energy: operational, \$427,397,000; capital, \$6,315,000.

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: operational, \$493,777,000; capital, \$60,082,000; financial transactions, \$1,410,000.

Executive Council: operational, \$48,397,000.

Health: operational, \$18,247,509,000; capital, \$111,294,000; financial transactions, \$72,500,000.

Human Services: operational, \$4,088,968,000; capital, \$6,038,000; financial transactions, \$680,000.

Infrastructure: operational, \$551,042,000; capital, \$1,143,854,000; financial transactions, \$73,150,000.

Innovation and Advanced Education: operational, \$2,705,983,000; capital, \$235,572,000; financial transactions, \$408,000,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: operational, \$39,410,000; capital, \$25,000.

Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: operational, \$166,797,000; capital, \$660,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: operational, \$1,246,014,000; capital, \$134,993,000.

Municipal Affairs: operational, \$423,235,000; capital, \$1,455,444,000; financial transactions, \$808,443,000.

Service Alberta: operational, \$295,483,000; capital, \$49,416,000; financial transactions, \$6,400,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: operational, \$170,471,000; capital, \$29,215,000.

Transportation: operational, \$512,720,000; capital, \$1,844,728,000; financial transactions, \$76,944,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: operational, \$131,369,000; capital, \$2,853,000; financial transactions, \$15,248,000; lottery fund transfer, \$1,485,550,000.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my report.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Introduction of Bills (reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Bill 8 Appropriation Act, 2014

Mr. Dallas: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Finance minister I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

This proposed legislation will amend our personal and corporate income tax acts. These are mostly technical and administrative amendments. They parallel federal tax changes and will maintain consistency between federal and Alberta legislation.

The amendments will also implement policy approved by this government in November 2013 to introduce a tax regime for qualifying environmental trusts, or QETs, in Alberta. Madam Speaker, QETs are a means to facilitate the accumulation of funds for future site reclamation. For example, QETs will help ensure that adequate funds are set aside to restore the environment after oil sands extraction. This new tax regime for QETs essentially shifts the tax burden on QET earnings from corporations to the QETs themselves. It is also important to note that the QET regime is revenue neutral.

3:20

Madam Speaker, this government has consulted with the energy industry, and they are supportive of this regime. Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Ontario have already adopted this special tax regime. As many of the pipeline and oil sands development corporations have their head offices here, Alberta is the logical place in which to locate these trusts. If these revenue-neutral tax changes are not made, it is likely that these trusts will be located in British Columbia or Saskatchewan even though it would make the most business sense for them to be located in Alberta.

I would also like to tell you about the proposed changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act which also form part of this legislation. Measures introduced by the federal government will increase the tax on dividends paid out of small-business income unless Alberta adjusts the dividend tax credit rate. The proposed changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act will prevent this unintended tax increase.

Other amendments are for housekeeping purposes or to make sure Alberta's legislation properly references applicable sections of the federal Income Tax Act.

In summary, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, will implement the technical and administrative changes necessary to maintain the integrity of our tax system and consistency between the federal and Alberta tax regimes, encourage companies to establish their QETs in Alberta by making our tax regime more competitive with respect to these trusts, and ensure that Alberta's tax legislation is aligned with federal tax legislation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll give a few brief points on Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, which involves, of course, qualifying environmental trusts, or QETs. These are, of course, trust funds established by resource developers for the sole purpose of reclamation.

The current tax regime in Alberta places corporations in a tax disadvantaged position by not allowing income generated in the trust to pay for corporate income tax. Resource developers must therefore pay income tax on the returns from the QETs with funds from their active businesses. Bill 7 creates a revenue-neutral tax regime that corrects this tax disadvantage and also, of course, includes several minor housekeeping amendments to accommodate technical and administrative changes that parallel the federal government changes in this area.

It is the Wildrose position that the change in Bill 7 for the QETs as well as the technical and administrative changes to income taxes bring us in line with the federal government tax regime, and that is a good thing. We also believe that it creates a revenue-neutral regime for the purpose of another tool used to ensure that there are proper financial resources available for resource development reclamation, which, of course, is a large part of responsible environmental stewardship. It places the financial cost of reclamation upon the project owner and operator versus government and taxpayers.

We do support this bill and look forward to its quick passage. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I always find these bills really interesting. You know, I'm certainly supportive

of socking money away to help pay for reclamation of pipeline and oil sands sites because, goodness knows, the system we're using right now doesn't work very well. Companies go bankrupt and disappear, and the site they had: nobody's looking after it. They're gone. They then become orphaned sites. Okay. Well, then we had an orphaned well fund. That doesn't seem to be covering the costs of it either.

You know, my constituents and a number of other people in the province say: "How come the polluter doesn't pay? How come in Alberta the polluter doesn't pay? Why don't they have to pay to clean up these reclamation sites?" And the government says: "Yeah, yeah. Well, they kinda do, sort of, mostly, sometimes." Well, maybe not. It's just not the deal we all signed up for. You know, just imagine going back to your mother or your grandmother and saying: yeah, well, I think I'm going to make a mess, but I don't think I'm going to be responsible for cleaning it up. The reaction of my mother or my grandmothers – yikes. I would have been brought into line very quickly on that one, and I think most people here would have. Not so much in the province of Alberta.

Even the brownfield sites that exist in the urban centres, which are the ones that I have to deal with: years and years and years, decades to deal with those abandoned sites or sites that had gas stations on them. A blight on the whole block. It's just a big, sucking, inactive hole. Sorry; it can't be inactive and sucking at the same time, but you get my point. It's a problem for us, and I think the lack of vigour of the government in pursuing a polluter-pays strategy with pipelines, abandoned wells, well sites, gas well sites is a broken deal, as far as I'm concerned, and it's very frustrating.

Again, I had two budget debates yesterday, so I haven't quite had time to read my way through this whole bill here, but I've started marking it up as you all expect from me. Well, revenue neutral is what the government says, but as best as I can tell, this is a way for them to be putting some money away and not paying so much income tax now so that they can clean up any sites that they need to clean up later. Okay. But from where I'm reading this, doesn't that still mean that they're getting a break on the taxes that they're paying now because they're going to end up paying a lesser rate? You know, somebody's going to explain that to me, so I'm looking forward to the explanation because, frankly, I just haven't had time to read the bill yet.

Is that the deal, that they're going to get a special rate? You know, when an individual puts money into, say, an RRSP, well, you don't pay interest or you pay a much lower interest rate on that money that you can prove you put into a set-aside fund. Or the tax savings fund – no, that's not quite the right name.

Mr. Mason: Tax-free savings account.

Ms Blakeman: Tax-free savings account. Thank you very much.

With that one, again, you're supposed to be paying a lower rate when you take it out, I think. The fact that you saved money – so you're not paying it out of your paycheque when you put it in there; when you take it out, you pay a lower rate. So it's a deal, right? It's an incentive. It's an encouragement.

Bottom line, Madam Speaker, incentives and disincentives are the only tool the government really has to try and change behaviour. So what I'm seeing here is government trying another way of changing the behaviour of companies developing the oil sands and conventional oil and gas sites to put more money away. They've chosen to do it in this way, with an environmental trust. Trusts always come with kind of special deals attached to them.

Am I opposed to the idea of setting money aside for this? No, I'm not. Obviously, I'm not. I want them to do that. If there's a special deal that goes along with the tax rate, I'm not so keen on it, to be perfectly honest. I mean, honestly, I just have not seen many oil and gas companies clutching their tattered rags about them, shivering on the corner. I really haven't. Now, some of them are smaller companies and even family companies, and they're not making the kinds of profits that others are. I understand that. But I have not seen anyone having to sell their silk tie for food. So they're not that badly off. If this is the only way we're going to get it, then, yes, okay, I'll support that, but I feel like I'm being backed into this one.

3:30

The other part of this, the technical changes. Maybe this is part of it this year, but we used to have this race to the bottom that a previous, previous, previous Treasurer by the name of Stockwell Day – he wanted to always be able to claim that we had the lowest tax regime, and every time the feds changed their percentage, it had an effect on ours and we were no longer at rock bottom, so we would rush out a bill in which he could stand up and say: this is going to bring us to the bottom again.

Decades later, from him doing that, I look around and say: really, was that such a great idea? You know, he's the guy that brought us the flat tax, and I can say now – and I can certainly say it on behalf of my constituents – that it was not a good idea. I don't think the flat tax has benefited middle-income earners at all. I think it has imperilled them. It has certainly made them work harder for the same or a lesser amount of money. They are the first generation that is not doing better than their parents, and you've got to look around and say: "Well, what? Are they lazier?" No, I don't think so. "Are they getting paid less?" Well, that's an interesting point and a bit of a tangent, Madam Speaker, so I'll try and save that for the end. [interjection] Yeah, that particular tangent.

What we have in Alberta is this flat tax. Everybody pays the same. Yes. Except that it has a markedly different effect to pay a flat tax of 10 per cent on a salary of \$40,000 or \$50,000 than to pay a flat tax of 10 per cent – maybe it's 11 or 12 now; I don't know – when you have \$500,000 or \$600,000 worth of income every year. Not many people get that kind of money, but there are certainly some senior officials in Alberta that do get that kind of money. You know, we've heard about it. Certainly, in the private sector lots of people make that kind of money, so 10 per cent for them is pocket fluff. Pocket fluff. It does not have nearly the same effect on their standard of living. It has no effect on their standard of living or their pension plan or anything else, but it has a huge effect on someone that's making \$40,000.

The flat tax was a really bad idea, it continues to be a really bad idea, and I would very much like to see the end of it. If this act is doing anything to sort of prop it up or make it look good or make it look good in comparison to anybody else, then I'm not in favour of it.

The other thing to keep in mind with the personal income tax structure that we have here is the fact that we're spending all of our nonrenewable resource revenue. When I explain this to people, I say, you know: every day the money that the government spends to provide programs and services is only being collected through taxes and fees and other ways they have of making money, 70 cents of every dollar that they're spending. "What? How can that be?" Well, that's because they charge a really low income tax, so they're only collecting 70 per cent. Well, where is the other 30 per cent coming from? That would be coming from

the nonrenewable resource revenues, specifically conventional oil and gas and, increasingly, from the oil sands sector.

So we're subsidizing our everyday – today's, tomorrow's, yesterday's – provincial programs and services from that nonrenewable resource wealth. Also, if the price of a barrel of oil in the States or wherever changes, that's the money that really gets affected. What happens to the government? Well, they're already trying to spend as little as they possibly can on the number of programs because ideologically they're conservatives. They want a smaller government. They want to spend less money. Nobody should be surprised about this. This is what they stand for. So they want to spend the least amount of money possible on all of these programs.

Now, they're in real trouble if the 30 per cent that they're subsidizing themselves with or subsidizing the budget with is worth less, and that's what happens sometimes. Is this the answer to our problems? No. I don't think that's working out so well for Albertans, and I see that every day. I see the wage gap widening between the very, very wealthy and the working middle-income and low-income people in this province. How can that be? How can rich people be getting even richer, more and more and more money, while for people that are working every day to provide programs and services – teachers and nurses and plumbers and all kinds of small-business people and middle-sized business people – their money is worth less. It's buying them less stuff today than it bought them 10 years ago.

There's that issue of what tax rate we're actually charging, and there's the issue of subsidizing ourselves by our nonrenewable resource revenue because once we've used it once, it's gone. I think what we should be doing is taking that nonrenewable resource revenue and putting it into endowment funds – if you want to call it something else, fine; call it something else – and letting it build up interest, which we can then spend because that is renewable. That kind of money making money is renewable. But nonrenewable resource revenue: once you've sold that barrel of oil once, it's gone, and you can't get it out of the ground again. You got it out once; it's gone. And I think it's causing real problems for us.

In a lot of ways we're not as creative as we could be and the government is not as creative as it could be because we have too much money. I mean, really, if the government gets into trouble: dig a bit more out and chuck it at the problem. They don't really have to come up with something new and innovative. In the 17 years I've been in here, I haven't seen anything that is new and innovative. I see a lot of retreads and slight adjustments and tinkering but very, very little that is genuinely innovative and taking the lead on new things because we don't have to. We're not desperate. We can always subsidize it with money from those resources.

I think there are two things that need to be addressed. One is to take that nonrenewable resource revenue out of the budget lines and put it aside so that that amount of money builds up for us but also those that come after us.

The other part of that is that the oil is not going to last forever. There are pretty good reserves in there. I'm not arguing that. But, you know, they are finite. What's much more likely is that people will stop buying our coal and gas and liquid natural gas and bitumen. That's much more likely just given the way the world is moving, especially when this government is so obstinate on not getting out from under the black eye it's given itself and getting out there and really doing some brilliant, innovative, new techniques and supporting some of the wonderful research that is going on in this province to make the oil sands and conventional

oil and gas less consuming of water, getting rid of the tailings ponds, all those things that we know we're supposed to be doing.

That's the reason why I think that money needs to be set aside and that I think we need to increase the income tax. People go: "Oh, my God. You can't be increasing the income tax. Tax-and-spend Liberals." Well, actually, when I go out and talk to people and say: "What do you want? Do you want to pay the same as . . ." [A timer sounded] Oh, you see, Madam Speaker, that's why I need batteries.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: On 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, the standing order.

Mr. Mason: Well, I just wanted to know if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre wished to continue her point that she was just making about tax-and-spend Liberals.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, Standing Order 29(2)(a) requires a question and answer, so a question?

Mr. Mason: Would she like to do that?

Ms Blakeman: Actually, Madam, it does allow for statements. It does say that in there.

I never understood that because in my life the debts have not been incurred by Liberal governments; they've been incurred by Conservative governments. Despite the fact that Conservatives are the ones that go around saying, "Aren't we wonderful money managers," our debts federally and provincially have been exclusively by Conservative governments. So don't talk to me about tax-and-spend Liberals.

Mr. Mason: Well, you brought it up.

3:40

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, I know, but it's the Conservatives that really cause those debts.

I ask people: do you want the services, or do you want to pay the lowest taxes in Canada? And they ultimately say: "Yeah, we want the services, but we want good services. We don't want people to be giving us, you know, something cheap and selling it as something better. We, honest to God, want those streets plowed. We don't want them bladed or whatever the difference is there." They want quality stuff. They're willing to pay the taxes, but they want quality services for it. To which I say: "Great. It's a deal." That's the way I think it should be, and that's what I would like to see.

Do I approve in principle of Bill 7? I don't know, one, because I haven't been able to read the whole thing, and two, because if it is repeating a number of the things that I've just gone through, then, no, I don't support it. I think we have to be very careful about this. You know, people say: oh, don't change the tax rules so that it's a disincentive for me to make more money. I've never seen that stop them from making money. I've never seen anyone that actually said that to me, that shut their business down to go and sit in the corner and fold their arms and go: "That's it. I'm not working anymore because you're going to tax me more. The more I make, the more I'm taxed." Well, I've never seen them do that. They seem to keep working. They seem to be keeping making money. So what's the problem?

I think we've been hoodwinked from a very, very long procession of conservative ideology on what government is supposed to

provide and what kind of tax is needed to provide programs and services. [interjections] I'm sure they're just on their way out. There we go. We've been hoodwinked, and I don't think we should . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, just so you know, we do have one more question that needs to be asked.

Ms Blakeman: Sure.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask about: the hon. member started her speech with a complaint about the fact that we don't have a polluter-pay system. I wonder if she's aware that the bill that we're discussing does not establish a tax regime to encourage people to set up these trusts. We already have to set up these trusts. It's a mandatory thing to set up these trusts because we do have a polluter-pay system.

The bill that we're talking about provides a competitive tax regime to encourage companies to locate those trusts in Alberta, which we think makes sense, first of all, because that's where their head offices are. Second of all, that money can be invested in accordance with trust legislation in Alberta, and we think that's a good thing. The corporations are already required to set up those trusts because we do have a polluter-pay system in this province.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks for that. Well, I think you and I are going to have to agree to disagree on that definition of polluter-pay. You believe that your system is working, and I don't believe your system is working. But I appreciate the background on the fact that this is not to set up the trust; this is to entice the businesses to set up the trusts here in Alberta. I'll give you that. I'd rather have it here than somewhere else as long as Albertans and our lands are going to be the beneficiaries of this. If it's a trust that just gives them a better tax break and we come out of this with less, well, then, it's not so good. But if this is an enticement of an additional percentage point so they'll be here rather than in B.C., then I'm willing to go for it. I appreciate the briefer because I only got to page – it doesn't look like very far.

Thanks very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we have 20 seconds on 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, on second reading, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and give a few comments with respect to Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. Now, I'm quoting the minister on this, the Government House Leader, and it's consistent with what we just heard.

The proposed legislation also implements a tax regime for qualifying environmental trusts to help facilitate the accumulation of [these] funds for future reclamation of pipeline and oil sands sites.

I note that the minister also indicated:

These are revenue-neutral changes [intended to] encourage the creation of trusts here in Alberta, where the majority of pipeline and oil sands activities occur.

[These] changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act will prevent unintended tax increases resulting from federal changes to the dividend tax credit system.

Others are just housekeeping items.

Now, the biggest change in this is the implementation of a tax regime for environmental trusts that is supposed to encourage companies to set up trusts in Alberta that will help them facilitate

the payment of future reclamation efforts once their projects are complete. A qualifying environmental trust is a special kind of trust under the Income Tax Act of Canada that is maintained solely for the purpose of accumulating funds to finance the future reclamation of a qualifying site such as an oil sands mine or a pipeline. A QET is the only vehicle that enables a corporation to claim a tax deduction in the year for the amount set aside for future reclamation.

Specifically, a QET refers to a trust resident in a province maintained at that time for the sole purpose of funding the reclamation of a site in the province that had been used primarily for or for any combination of the operation of a mine or the deposit of waste where the maintenance of the trust is or may become required under terms of a contract entered into with Canada or the province. It does not include a trust that relates to the reclamation of a well.

Madam Speaker, it's clear that Alberta's new tax regime for QETs parallels and reflects the federal tax regime and is similar to regimes already in place in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

We have some questions, I think. First of all – and I hope that these questions can be addressed when the minister responds or when we're in committee, anyway – how many of the firms currently operating in Alberta will meet the definition of a small single project? We'd like to know how the large companies, massive companies with multiple projects will use these trusts or do use these trusts, or would they only use them at the end of the project's life, still relying on lines of credit for the majority of the projects? We want to make sure – and this is the concern – that we are not making it easier to get off the hook when it comes to leaks or other damage. We hope that this will not just be another tax giveaway.

Now, most of the changes in the bill, Madam Speaker, appear to be bookkeeping based around maintaining consistency with the federal personal and corporate income tax changes aside from the implementation of these QETs. So we will be prepared at this stage, depending on what we hear in answers, to give a tentative and cautious approval. We are generally in support of qualifying environmental trusts because they ensure that the money for environmental remediation relating to mines and tailings ponds is clearly put aside up front rather than relying on credit to finance remediation in the future. QETs to this point in time have been largely ignored in favour of letters of credit. If these changes are indeed truly revenue neutral and actually encourage greater uptake of the QET model, then we are prepared to be supportive.

We are interested in knowing how many QETs are currently in place in the province, whether any more are being considered or anticipated, and whether or not the minister thinks these changes will be significant enough to increase the number. That, of course, is one of the stated objectives of the bill. In addition, we're hoping that the minister can fill us in on whether or not – well, I guess I've answered that question.

It has been noted in some studies that B.C. and the Northwest Territories have been the most active in demanding fully funded environmental trusts prior to mining. Hence, that's where most of the QETs to date have been established. So it's not just a matter of adjusting the tax relationship to match other jurisdictions; it's also a question of insisting that these trusts be established and fully fund any future environmental liability.

3:50

Some general support for QETs aside, Madam Speaker, we do have some concerns regarding the potential for tax avoidance

through the timing of establishing and withdrawing from a QET. Because contributions to a QET are deductible and the funds are contributed to income on the way out, there is a concern that improperly timed QETs might be able to reduce the overall tax and royalty contribution. We'd like to know what safeguards have been put in place to make sure that this doesn't happen.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of other points not covered in the bill, some of which were touched on by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, that I would like to highlight. The question of corporate taxation rates in this province is an issue that we continue to be very concerned about. There are potentially billions of dollars of additional revenue that could be collected in corporate taxes based on the profits of the corporations, and Alberta could yet remain the most competitive tax jurisdiction in Canada. That's an objective that we have in the NDP, to not only increase the revenue side to fund the programs that Albertans want and ensure that taxation regimes are fair so that the people who benefit the most from our province and our society contribute the most, something that doesn't exist now, but also that we remain competitive in terms of our tax regime relative to other jurisdictions in the province. It's amazing how much flexibility the government could have, if it chose to, in adjusting tax rates, keeping our taxes competitive in all categories and still making sure that we are increasing the revenues, which we badly need to do in this province.

I'd also like to just mention Premier Lougheed's resource royalty targets. We need to ensure that we get full value for the resources, which we all own together. All Albertans own these resources. I think that his target of 30 per cent of the value of the oil and gas in the ground coming to the owners is still a very valid target. We have slipped in Alberta since those days and collect about 9 per cent of the value of the oil and gas in the ground for the owners. The rest goes to the companies that are extracting these resources. That's actually a lower rate than was collected by the previous Social Credit government in this province. I think it's a crime that the government is letting the oil companies take us to the cleaners, literally. In fact, I won't blame the oil companies. I'll blame the government because they're the ones that set the royalty framework. That's something that I think we want to talk about, also the flat tax, which I've talked about in this House as well. Many of the same points apply to that.

I just wanted to indicate that the people that we've talked to or heard from with respect to this are generally supportive. I'll just quote one, and that is Andrew Leach, who is a noted energy economist at the University of Alberta. He says, and I quote: putting my NDP hat on, it's hard to find a reason to object to QETs; they should be close to revenue neutral, potentially cheaper as debt-carrying costs are left out, and put the costs of reclamation front and centre.

On that basis and pending some response to some of the questions that I've raised, Madam Speaker, I want to indicate the cautious and tentative support of the New Democratic Party caucus with respect to this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you wish to speak under 29(2)(a) or on the bill in second reading?

Dr. Swann: On the bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody under 29(2)(a)? Please proceed, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. It proposes amendments to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act and the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to accommodate technical and administrative changes that parallel federal government changes and implements a tax regime for qualifying environmental trusts, QETs, to help facilitate the accumulation of funds for future reclamation of pipeline and oil sands sites. I presume, then, that it does not apply to other industrial operations like mining operations. I'm thinking of coal. If it does, that isn't clear to me.

Obviously, we've had very little time to review this, but I have a number of questions before I can give it even a qualifying support. Who gets to qualify these environmental trusts? By what criteria do we assess certain activities as being in and others as being out? Whose interests are being served by including some and not others? What do we do with those corporations that are multinational and have the ability to move money between this country and other countries? What is the nature, what is the size of the qualifying amount that will ultimately result in tax deductions for that corporation? Is it verified, or are companies just able to put in whatever they choose to put in there in order to gain short-term tax advantage?

I'm reminded – I suppose it would be about five years ago – of when former environment minister Guy Boutilier was challenged on the need for a downstream environmental cleanup fund for oil and gas and other industries and said that he would very strongly support that. The next day the oil industry visited him, and he publicly stated that he was no longer interested in downstream reclamation funds, orphan-type funds, for the downstream oil and gas industry. We still don't have any interest in a fund that would ensure that the downstream oil and gas sector is paying its full share and putting aside funds when they have to abandon some of the refinery sites, some of the various pits, those environmental scars on the environment that constitute the downstream oil and gas activity.

I still have a lot of skepticism about this government's commitment to the environment and its willingness to take the costs now and not put them forward onto future generations when some of these corporations go out of business. Obviously, this bill promotes itself as a vehicle for cleaning up some of these sites, but again it's qualifying environmental trusts, and it's not clear to me how they qualify. Again, it's a serious question about how much companies are putting aside and what their benefits are by inflating that cost and if, in fact, those costs will be even close to the cleanup costs.

I wonder if, for example, the multibillion dollars in cleanup costs associated with the oil sands are going to be in any way reflected in some of these trusts when we've already seen that this government only requires a fraction of 1 per cent as a down payment on some of those cleanup costs in the oil sands on an annual basis from some of these large corporations, which means, ultimately, that if these assets get stranded, we are not going to be seeing anything from these corporations, who have put down pennies on the dollar in relation to the cleanup costs. It's going to fall to the public purse and to our children's children perhaps or to our children to make sure that these cleanup costs are adequately addressed.

I have a lot of questions about the whole financing around risk and environmental cleanup and the long-term commitment that we have not made to some of the, well, multibillion dollars of liabilities that we are passing on to future generations in this province, not the least of which I'm increasingly aware of in relation to fracking and groundwater issues, which still haven't been properly investigated. Still no reports on the website in

relation to how many groundwater sources have been contaminated by fracking. Even though we have the technology for isotope testing and examining individual water wells that have gas in water, we still have no completion of a 2006 study for a baseline groundwater assessment, 12,000-odd groundwater tests carefully taken at \$2,000 to \$3,000 per test, all at some level tested and no analysis of this roughly \$30 million – Madam Speaker, I’m having trouble speaking over the noise.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we’re all having trouble hearing. Can you keep the noise down, please? Thank you.

Dr. Swann: More than 12,000 groundwater tests taken at a cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000 each and still no analysis of whether any single groundwater sample was contaminated by industry. It’s a scandal, Madam Speaker. I have great difficulty in believing that anything this government puts forward in relation to environmental costs and environmental reclamation is going to actually serve the public interest as opposed to the corporate interest.

In respect to my earlier comments about the lack of bonding or deposits or savings these trusts appear to be, at least on the surface of it, an attempt to put aside funds, but I think we deserve a lot more information from this minister about exactly how these criteria are established and when we’re going to see the level of investment put aside for cleanup costs that is merited.

Those are my preliminary questions and comments, Madam Speaker. I look forward to hearing some answers. It’s very clear to me that this government has made no serious attempt at long-term security for the higher environmental risks and negligence that’s gone on in this province for 20 to 30 years, so I’m not optimistic that this is going to be a substantive benefit to Alberta and to the long-term interests of our children.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any questions or comments for the hon. member?

Seeing none, I would ask: are there any other members who want to speak to Bill 7 in second reading?

Are you ready to close, Minister?

Mr. Dallas: I can make some comments, Madam Speaker, yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Are you making comments under 29(2)(a) or closing comments?

Mr. Dallas: Well, I’ll make them closing comments.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to thank the hon. members for the debate at second reading of Bill 7. There were a number of good questions that were posed there, some a little bit technical in nature, examples being: how many firms will meet the definition of a small single project, and how many existing QETs are in place today? I think we need to do a little bit of research, so I ask for some latitude from the hon. members. We’ll quickly try and find those numbers, and we’ll present those, hopefully, at Committee of the Whole. If that’s not possible, I’ll make the commitment that we’ll have those numbers certainly before third reading.

There were a number of questions that were posed around the tax neutrality, that I could address right now, but I think I would ask for a little bit of latitude from the Assembly. I’ll come back

and make one presentation that seems to sum up all of the questions that were asked.

I also want to respectfully submit that perhaps as much as 75 per cent of the debate was on policies that were inside the scope and realm of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and the like. I won’t be addressing those, nor the corporate and personal income tax rate schedules. We’ll keep the debate from the government side specific to the matters which are proposed in Bill 7.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would move that we close debate on Bill 7 at second reading and call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I’d like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 6

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s a pleasure to rise today and present to Committee of the Whole Bill 6, the proposed New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014. I’d like to thank all the members who participated in second reading debate for their supportive comments.

Bill 6 contains minor modifications to the existing act. It provides clarification and technical changes in the way some provisions are implemented. Section 2 contains changes to the definitions in the act. The term “common facilities” is defined to cover parts of the condominium buildings that are not common property as the term is conventionally defined under section 1 of the Condominium Property Act.

Common property has two definitions in the act. One is under section 1, and a different definition is under section 14.

Section 2 contains the renaming of the term “purchase period” to “protection period” in section 1(1)(y) of the act.

Section 3 introduces section 1.1 to the act, which sets out how the protection period is calculated for new homes. This section was introduced for drafting reasons as section 1(1)(y) would have been too long with all of these subsections. The provisions in new subsections 1.1(3), 1.1(4), and 1.1(5) clarify how the protection period is calculated for condominium conversions.

Sections 4 and 6 are both amendments consequential to the drafting of the protection period. Both provisions now refer to the protection period instead of separately setting up an identical 10-year term for each section. Sections 4 and 5 also contain provisions originally in the regulations.

Section 5 introduces the rental use designation into section 3(1) of the act. Builders and owners of multiple family dwelling buildings will be required to register caveats in respect of rental use designations on a building’s land title to get an exemption from home warranty insurance requirements. This exemption comes from the regulations but now requires a land titles registration.

New subsections 3.1(5), 3.1(6), 3.1(7), 3.1(8), and 3.1(9) in the act address how these caveats are registered on land titles,

maintained on land titles, and discharged on land titles. The rental use designation must stay on the land title for 10 years. During the protection period for the uninsured multiple family dwelling building all discharges of rental-use-designation caveats require an application to the registrar under the New Home Buyer Protection Act, who will discharge the caveat from the land title at the end of an uninsured building's purchase period.

Sections 7 and 8 come from the regulations and contain the New Home Buyer Protection Act registrar's powers to clarify which buildings qualify as a new home and delegate responsibilities to staff.

4:10

Section 9 clarifies that administrative penalties may apply on a per-unit basis. It also requires that administrative penalties are paid or posted by an irrevocable letter of credit prior to filing an appeal. Irrevocable letters of credit are issued by banks, and they are similar to cheques that cannot be cancelled. The process is similar to security for costs in a court action. If an appeal is successful, the letter is returned. If the appeal is not successful, the letter is cashed. Consequential amendments in other sections confirm that the requirement to pay or post an administrative penalty cannot be stayed by the board on appeal.

Sections 10 to 15 are board related. These changes to the appeal process are intended to increase efficiencies. Some of these provisions are adopted from the regulations. Appeals are to be filed directly with the board. The chair of the board may delegate powers subject to regulations. The board may make rules of procedure subject to regulations, and the board has the ability to order costs and determine the sufficiency, validity, and timeliness of document service. These provisions originate in the regulations. All appeals are due within 30 days instead of one month.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment I'd like to submit to the chair.

The Deputy Chair: We will take a minute as we pass the amendment around. This will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, I think that you can proceed now if you'd like to.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 8 by adding the following after the proposed section 8.1:

Limitation on Fees

8.2 Notwithstanding any other section in this Act, the Registrar shall not impose a fee for the registration of a new home built by an individual for personal use.

Madam Chair, this was discussed in second reading. There is discrimination in the form of how the fees are charged as a result of the regulations. What this amendment proposes to do is to correct that.

I want to explain. Under this New Home Buyer Protection Act and under the amendment act itself the new homes carry – and I'm just going to paraphrase here – a 10-year protection period. Anyone can get technical. There's a two-year for different portions, but it's a 10-year protection period. Anything beyond 10 years is moot. So whether a person is exempt or nonexempt, beyond 10 years means nothing.

A nonexempt person, a residential builder, when they want to register to this new IT system that has been created, calls in to the

Minister of Municipal Affairs, and they get a user name and a password. With this user name and password they go onto a website. They enter the password. The next column is a drop-down box of the warranty companies. They check the warranty company. They enter their project number, which is the next line down. The application date is automatic. That's when they log in to the system. Then there's a drop-down box on what type of property there is, and the builder then checks off the type of property. The builder then goes down to the next level, enters in the address, and if there's a unit number, they put in the address and unit number. Then they pay a fee of \$95, and that's just to enter the data. They go out, and they buy the warranty. It's their business how much they pay for the warranty.

The individual who's applying for exempt status does pretty much the exact same thing. They call the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. They get their user name and password. They go onto a little bit of a different portal, a little bit different website, and they enter in all the data. Then they have to pay \$750 because they're applying for an exemption.

Now, what we did to investigate this is that we had two individuals, one from Edmonton and one from Red Deer, propose to go in and get an exemption, and each one talked to the ministry that was involved, which is the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. There is no extra work to put this in the system. As a matter of fact, when a residential homeowner is applying for an exemption, all they do is fill out the proper data, and if they qualify for an exemption, they receive their exemption. It's no different than if the residential builder, who's not exempt, fills out their entry. So why does one get charged \$750 and another get charged only \$95? That is fundamentally wrong. That is biased, and that is discriminatory. Realistically, it's nothing but a tax grab.

Now, nothing changes for the homeowner. If you're a homeowner-builder and you get a mortgage, you're going to need mortgage insurance as the bank dictates. If you build your house in Edmonton or Calgary or in Rimbey, you still have to have the building inspectors come out for your foundation, for your framing, for your electrical, for your plumbing. That's four inspections minimum, and in some cases there's a full-envelope inspection, depending on the jurisdiction you're in. So it doesn't change the inspection or the fees that you pay a local municipality. Nothing changes. Why should somebody be forced to buy a home warranty? If they're planning on living in their house and are building their own house, they are the person responsible, and they plan on living in it forever or at least 50 years or more. That is why they get the exemption. After 10 years, again, remember, everything is moot.

What we're looking for here with this motion is just to be fair. The individual homeowner-builder is applying for an exemption so they don't have to have home warranty. Why should they have to pay a fee? That just doesn't make sense. All they're doing is paying for – what? Seven hundred and eighty dollars gets them what? That hasn't been answered.

I had these people ask specifically at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' offices: does somebody come out to inspect? One of the government workers said: "What would they inspect? You're only filling out a form on the Internet." They're not out there to inspect the building. That's up to the building inspectors. That's an entirely different jurisdiction.

I want to make sure that we understand what's happening here. There is no extra work involved. Either they fill out the correct data that qualifies for an exemption or they do not, and if they don't get the exemption, then they still have to go get the warranty insurance, and that's only good for 10 years. Clearly, those people who do qualify for an exemption are those acreage builders that

are building on their homesteads, willing to continue to farm where they were born and raised, where probably their parents and grandparents homesteaded. That's all they're looking to do. They're not looking to enter the housing market, to build a house to sell a house. That's not their goal.

So the law itself is fundamentally good in that sense. It allows them an exemption. What is prejudicial is the fee that is being imposed upon them. That's wrong. All they're doing is entering the data on a website, and it's one page of data.

Now, there could be somebody coming out, as one of the bureaucrats stated, if you commit fraud. Well, that's a totally different ball of wax altogether. That's got nothing to do with the system. If somebody commits fraud, that could even be criminal. That's taken under the Criminal Code. That's a whole different ball game. If somebody does not fall into compliance and somehow violates the rules that are governing this, they are subject to fines. That, again, is a whole different ball of wax, and that's equal to both sides. Whether it's a contractor that's exempt or one that's not exempt, they still would fall under the same thing.

It isn't like there's any more work for either one. What this is is a brand new bureaucratic registration system. It's an online system. But if you're applying for exempt status, you get charged \$750. It gets you nothing more than the other one.

Clearly, we have a real problem here. I'm hoping the minister will keep an open mind and look at this. An exempt status under this motion would make that exemption complete: they're exempt from the fee.

4:20

Here's why they should be exempt from the fee. If they're planning on owning that home for more than 10 years, now it's all moot. If they own the home for more than 10 years, what was once on the registration system means nothing now anyway. So why should they pay to get on the registration system?

Again, it is something that we want to correct. There are a lot of homeowners out there that are going to be owner-builders that qualify for the exemption that plan on living in their new home forever or for however long. There is a risk for them, but that's the risk that they accept. If they try to sell the house prior to 10 years, then they've got to go get the warranty. That's a risk that they take. What the site probably should do to help homeowner-builders is make sure that they have the information to know that. It's not that clear. It's clear in the law, but you have to read the legislation. It's absolutely clear that if you're exempt and you try to sell that house before the 10-year period is over, you cannot sell that house until you go get the liability insurance. That's already covered.

Again, as we walk through the system both with the nonexempt and the with exempt, there is no extra work. All it is is an individual getting a password. All it is is an individual filling out the forms on the Internet, and either they qualify or they don't qualify. It's not a big deal. Why the difference in the fees? Why the fee in the first place if you're exempt? That doesn't make sense.

So I would like to hear from the minister and see what he has to say about this. I know that when I asked you in a note, you sent a note back to me. It was stated in the estimates by the deputy minister that there would be a site visit. That's not logical. It makes no sense. Why would you do a site visit to see what somebody entered on the computer given the fact that there's no building on the site to begin with? You apply for this before you buy your first stick of lumber. Don't tell me that there's a site visit. When you call Municipal Affairs and ask them, they tell you

bluntly that there's no site visit. Clearly, somebody's got it wrong. There needs to be some answers here to clear this up.

I can tell you this. There are a number of rural home builders that are going to be owner-builders that are exempt, and I can't imagine that you would go out to every one for a site visit. That doesn't make sense. What are you visiting the site for? Building inspectors will go out to the site, but those are municipalities. You're going out to the site to see if somebody entered the form correctly? That doesn't make sense to me.

Clearly, the information being passed by the government workers when you call in, what they're telling people – and we got that information – is that there is no site visit. If the minister is going to stand behind the site visit, what does the site visit do? We need to understand that. That \$750 fee doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense that we would have a site visit. All the parameters for building inspections, for licensing, for getting your zoning, for getting your occupancy permit: that's all taken care of by another jurisdiction. It has nothing to do with this registration system. So I'm not sure why we would have a site visit.

I see the minister shaking his head that there's a site visit for data entry, so I've got to hear and, hopefully, get an answer as to why we're having a site visit. How many employees are we hiring to go out? I can tell you that in my constituency alone almost every farmer who's cutting off 20 acres for a son or a daughter to take over the farm is going to be an owner-builder that will be exempt. They will build their own homes, and they will live on the homestead with the intention of always farming there for their careers, for their lives. They definitely qualify for the exempt status. What are they getting? What's the value of the visit? It doesn't make sense to me.

Minister, I hope you take this into consideration and you can provide me with some answers on why they should pay \$750 for an exempt status.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other speakers to amendment A1? Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, are you speaking to the amendment?

Dr. Swann: No. I'm speaking to the bill.

The Deputy Chair: We're on the amendment. Thank you.

To the amendment, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's wonderful to stand today in support of my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on this amendment. I was hoping that we would actually see the associate minister stand up and answer some of the questions that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre had on this particular amendment and on the legislation and on the current . . . [interjection] Oh, he's now the minister? Sorry. The hon. acting minister. I had to get the right terminology there.

Anyway, I was hoping that he would stand up and answer some of these questions because the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre did make some valid arguments and some valid points on what's going on with this particular registration process.

I find it kind of interesting that if a builder was to go through this process to purchase the warranty, the registration is \$95. The cost to the builder is \$95. But if you're applying to be exempt from it, the cost is now – how much? – \$750. That's quite a difference. And you're not getting anything more. You're just filling out paperwork. It doesn't make any sense to me that the

response back would be that there would have to be a site inspection.

I can tell you that I come from the insurance industry. I didn't inspect something until there was something there to inspect. Why would I go out and inspect a hog barn if there wasn't a hog barn on that piece of property? Or if I was going to inspect a wood stove in a home to make sure the clearances were correct, you know, the wood stove actually had to be in the home for me to pull the measurement tape out and measure the different clearances to make sure that it conformed to the CSA stamp on the back of the wood stove.

I kind of find it interesting that there is this extra fee or this large fee that is different from what somebody applying to be registered with the warranty would be charged. It really doesn't make sense. It sounds like and it seems like we're just nickelling and diming Albertans. We're billing Albertans. Well, I guess that's something that is somewhat familiar to this government: billing Albertans. They continually bill Albertans for the mistakes that they're making.

It's kind of interesting that it's not even two years since this piece of legislation was passed and we're amending it already. Now, I do understand that legislation does require amendment from time to time to bring it up to date with what's going on in society, but we just passed this two years ago. I remember when we passed this. We did bring up some ideas and some issues that we saw with the legislation back then. Unfortunately, none of those issues were acted upon, so here we are, back two years later.

We saw this with the whistle-blower act as well when we're talking about legislation that we're coming back to already. Unfortunately, with the whistle-blower legislation we haven't seen the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation table an amendment to it, but we did clearly hear from Justice Vertes in his report that that piece of legislation did not cover all health workers and that we did need to revisit that brand new piece of legislation. Two years old. In fact, it was Bill 4 in that 2012 sitting, and this one was Bill 5.

It's just something that I've noticed since I've been in the Legislature here, that the legislation coming through sometimes isn't thought out as well as it should have been, and there isn't enough time spent on it. You know, we spend too much time going late into the evening and ramming legislation through that the government wants rammed through. It's unfortunate that we don't talk it out and meet with stakeholders and use our legislative committees in the way that you would think this Chamber would.

Again, we have an issue here with this particular amendment. We can fix it really easily. We could stop nickelling and diming Albertans.

But I digress. I will leave that to the minister. I would hope that he'd stand up and respond to the comments that were made by my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and talk about why there is this extra fee, the \$750 fee to fill out some paperwork, just documentation. Again I would ask that the acting minister please stand and respond to that.

Thank you very much for your time, Chair. I look forward to his comments.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on amendment A1.

Mr. Strankman: Actually, Madam Chair, it's Drumheller-Stettler. You had it half right at the outset.

The Deputy Chair: Oh, sorry. This is on amendment A1?

Mr. Strankman: To the amendment, yes, ma'am.

The Deputy Chair: Drumheller-Stettler, please.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you for that. I, too, would like to stand in support of this amendment because I feel it negatively affects and detracts from the Albertan initiative of self-starting. I see the member opposite from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, who knows well the riding that I'm from, that it includes the special areas, and I've sent a note to the Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs regarding the special areas. Out there we tend to start on our own. We don't have a lot of multiple-home builders. We sometimes in some cases build them with a single initiative.

It is with explanation from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre – he explains to me, and I understand it, that this \$750 charge is discriminatory for those people who have self-initiative. I would implore the minister to look at our amendment here with great sincerity and possibly consider action regarding an amendment to the legislation. It's not necessarily a large amount of money, but it holds to the principle that I believe that this province embodies. Those of us in rural ridings take great umbrage to discrimination, financial discrimination particularly, of a bureaucrat in a far-off location only available by phone to require additional fees.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll relinquish my position and implore that the minister review our amendment with all sincerity. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The hon. Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that if you look in Bill 6, you won't see any reference to any number of dollars for any of the charges or fees or anything that is being done. Bill 6 is amending the original bill to change and clarify some of the things that we did find in discussions with the home builders, with the insurance world. Bill 6 is an amending bill.

But I will speak to this because this is actually an attempt to amend the original legislation, that we passed last year. Those figures are held in regulation, Madam Chair, and they are fair, or at least we assume going forward that they're fair. We've set these fees up in discussions with the home builders. We've set them up in discussions with others in the business. It's easy to say that somebody is going to build it and stay forever, but we know there is no guarantee of forever. We know that when someone builds a home, whether it's in town or on a farm or anywhere else, things can change and happen in people's lives that allow that home to have to be sold. Saying "I intend" or "I plan" is really good, but this is about buyer protection. This is about ensuring that every person that makes the largest investment in their life has some ability to be protected, that that home is built to a certain standard, and that it can meet that challenge.

Madam Chair, if we're dealing with a builder, a builder that's registered and registered through the home builders and comes to us and registers, we know who we're dealing with. We know what they're doing. They simply fill out a piece of paperwork, and they can move forward. This amendment actually states that they "shall not impose a fee for the registration of a new home built by an individual for personal use." So every person in the province would not have to pay a fee for a home built for personal use. We've seen it in other jurisdictions, where when something like this is put in, every home built becomes a home built for personal

use. Builders build it for them, but it's registered for personal use, and you end up with no protection for anyone.

Madam Chair, we want fair fees. Want to ensure that we can deliver the services we have to. We are planning to include a site visit. When people register and pay the \$750, what this does do is give them that future flexibility to be able to get insurance on that home so that if they do have to sell it and they find themselves in difficult circumstances, they will be registered in the system, and the insurance company will know that a site visit has been done to ensure that a property has been built there, that the home that exists on that property has been registered. Then anyone coming forward to purchase it or before the seller has to sell it or chooses to, they can go forward, work with the insurance companies, and try to get that insurance so that people can buy it.

Madam Chair, I spend a lot of time talking to insurance companies. They do not like to insure a home five years after it was built when they didn't get to inspect it or see it built or have anything done, so it will make it very difficult for people after the fact to get it. This process is meant to help streamline that process, help to ensure that those folks can get insurance down the road because it's been a registered home, a registered build in the system.

Madam Chair, I would totally not support this. I think that for any home that is for personal use, not having a fee imposed would mean that every other home has to pick up that cost for that one. We are talking about an inspection being likely for all of these properties once they're built to ensure that they're there and that they meet the requirements of the act.

Madam Chair, I would ask my colleagues in the House to not support this amendment. We will go forward, but we'll continue to look at those fees. I know the issue around homes on farms has been brought up. We have looked at it. We'll continue to try to work with all parties to create a fair system, but at this time this is an inappropriate use, and I would ask that everyone vote against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: An exempt home is not about buyer protection. That's what's gone wrong here. If you're exempt, you're going to go beyond the 10-year period. Everything is moot to begin with. Everything is equal. There is no warranty insurance. To go out there doesn't make sense to me, and it doesn't make sense that you would inspect something today and think an insurance company is going to use that inspection, a private company of one of the bureaucrats going out there and giving some sort of validity to what they did inspect. That doesn't make sense.

Without even talking about the bureaucrat that you're saying that we're paying for to go out there, you get a warranty inspection if you buy the warranty. That's from the insurance company. You get a foundation inspection. All the municipalities do that today. They come out and they inspect the foundation, and they check that off. They come out, they check the plumbing, and they check that off. They come out and they check the electricity, and that is inspected. Most jurisdictions – and I believe most cities do this – do a full envelope inspection before you close a house in. You have all those inspections that take place other than just some bureaucrat coming out. So what does the bureaucrat do? I can understand wanting a record of the inspection. Force the homeowner to submit their inspection records: that makes sense. Why are you sending a bureaucrat out, and how are they trained to inspect a house?

An Hon. Member: You train them.

Mr. Anglin: Are you hiring a number of home inspectors? You're going to need hundreds. That doesn't make sense.

An Hon. Member: Just one.

Mr. Anglin: Member, I'm going to love to debate you. Don't worry. Come on down to my area.

But I will tell you this: \$750 doesn't get you anything compared to the \$95. It's not about the buyer protection for warranty. That's the difference. This is about somebody who's not intending to sell their house. They have a right. It's a risk. If they decide to sell it within five years, lo and behold, if you try to get warranty insurance, you're going to pay through the nose. Everyone knows that. But people who don't want to do that are the builder because they're the person that's warranting it, and they are planning on living in it for more than 10 years. That's the risk they take if they apply for exempt status. If for some reason they have to sell the house, the minister has an exemption appeal board that they can go to, but the fact is that you want to make sure this is done right.

4:40

I still can't see where you're telling me that someone is going to go out and visit. When we called in Edmonton and Red Deer – and we did this yesterday – when we inquired to see the purpose of the fee, what we were told by one of the people that was handling the phone calls for the ministry, the agent on the helpline, is that she didn't know the exact reason for the fee besides that it was administrative. Then up here in Edmonton what they said was that there wouldn't be a site inspection associated with the fee although there could be an inspection if you break the law or if you commit fraud, but that's a whole different ball game. A builder that sells houses could commit fraud. I would suggest to you that they probably commit more infractions than the homeowner that qualifies for an exemption, the homeowner who wants to live in this. What we are looking for is a fair way of dealing with exemptions.

To say that a bureaucrat is going to go out there: I didn't see that in the budget. Where are they going to get all the bureaucrats from? It's not in your budget. How many do you plan on hiring? It's just not there. So I don't understand when you're saying that the registration system is going to send somebody out to inspect, to double-check the building inspectors, the minimum four, if not five, that are going to go out to the house anyway and sign off on it. All you need to do on the administrative level for anyone who is exempt is to say: before we give you the exemption status, submit to us all the forms from the various inspectors that came out so we have them as part of the record. But for \$750 that doesn't make sense.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the bill. Speaking on Bill 6, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Madam Chair, I have another amendment to submit to you.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I'll take one moment here to have the amendments passed out. Hon. members, this amendment will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, would you like to proceed?

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 8 by adding the following after the proposed section 8.1:

Limitation on Fees

8.2 The Registrar shall not impose a fee for the registration of a new home built by an individual for personal use that is greater than the fee imposed for the registration of a new home built by a residential builder.

Now, the hon. minister said earlier that he wanted something fair and equitable. That's what this is going to impose in legislation, something fair and equitable. In other words, the fees will be equal. All we're doing here, Minister, is entering data on a data system. I understand you say that there are going to be inspections, but as I just read to you, the people that we're talking to from the ministry say that there's not going to be an inspection. Clearly, somebody has got some misinformation here.

I will tell you something else. I don't understand how you're going to get that number of inspectors out there if you don't have it in your budget. It's not there. What type of inspectors are you planning on hiring? These homes, all of them, whether they're exempt or nonexempt, are going to have a foundation inspection and paperwork to support it. Each one will have a plumbing and electrical inspection and the paperwork to support it, and each one will probably have a full envelope, with some jurisdictions that don't do a full envelope inspection. So that's four inspections right there. For those that are nonexempt, they will have the warranty inspection, but that is only good for 10 years. Again, after 10 years it's all moot. So we're dealing with the individual homeowners who qualify, not the ones who are looking to sell their homes.

In my area mostly they're farmers looking to build another house on the family farm that they plan on taking over. They have no intention of selling it, and they have no intention of moving. Many of them do qualify for an exemption. They're quite talented; they build their own homes. They are their own general contractor. They build it not to cut corners but just the opposite. I will say this. Statistically – and you should know this – we don't have problems with single-family homes as compared to things like condominiums and those types of builders. That's what your law takes care of quite well. It covers that with that 10-year warranty. But this is about the exemption and treating them fairly, and that's all we're asking. If you tell me that it costs us more to deal with the exemption, I just don't see it. If you tell me that we have to send an inspector out there, it doesn't make sense. You'd make better use of your time if you just made a requirement that all the inspections that did take place got submitted with the paperwork to qualify for the exemption. It could save a lot of money, and you don't need to send somebody out there.

It's really curious that you would send somebody to inspect but that nobody knows what they're going to inspect. Are they foundation inspectors? What type of building inspectors are they that the government is going to hire? Are they for electricity? Are they for plumbing? If they don't get out there while the home is under construction, they can't do the inspection.

Now, again, we all know that there is a risk to the person that qualifies for an exemption should they try to sell their house, but the law is quite specific. There's no risk to the buyer. They can't sell that house within 10 years unless they get a warranty. That's

absolutely clear in the original act. So there's no threat to the buyer, and the fee doesn't add anything. The law covers that.

What we're asking, Minister, is exactly what you just said. You want something that's fair. This is fair, that everyone pays the same fee to enter the data. What you do with the data is your business. The law is clear on how you deal with privacy and everything else. This is only about the application to either get exempt status or not. I'd like to hear what the minister has to say about treating everyone equally and not being prejudicial to those that qualify for the exemption. Remember that once they try to sell that house, they're no longer exempt. They have to get the home warranty insurance.

To give an example of fair, if somebody buys a home or builds a home, they qualify for an exemption. Now they want to give up their exemption and get a warranty, and they pay for that. They had paid \$750 to register initially for the exemption, and now they have a homeowner warranty compared to the one who paid \$95 and has a homeowner warranty. That's not fair. I think we can do something and be universal with this and have a fair fee that is not outrageous in the form of \$750.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd like to hear what the minister has to say to that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Well, Madam Chair, I find this a really unusual debate. I find it unusual that the member stood and so passionately tried to sell the last amendment to me and now stands up and tells me that it wasn't fair and that this one is because it changes those fees. I'm not here to try and negotiate back and forth on what fee we're going to charge to whom. This isn't a negotiation. We're not going to raise it \$10 or \$15 a time on each amendment until we find something that works. We're going to put a program in place that works. The best thing is: "Have everybody buy the insurance. Then it's done. Then if they have to sell that home, it's finished. Let them get the insurance they need."

But you know what? We decided we weren't going to go that way. We're going to try to create a little bit of room. Most of these exempt homes don't exist in your municipality, and they don't exist in rural Alberta. They exist in Calgary and Edmonton and Lethbridge and Red Deer. Yes, there are a few in rural Alberta, but they exist in all of our communities. We want to make sure that the buyers that walk in to purchase those homes are protected, and we don't want people assuming that in a year from now – they built it; now they want to sell it, anyway – when they decide to, they'll be able to just go and get the insurance.

What we're trying to do is get people to buy the insurance when they're building it. If they have a very legitimate reason to ask for an exemption, they can do that. There is a fee for that to help manage that exemption through the process. We don't even yet know how much work that exemption is going to cost, especially if some of these people start coming back to us down the road and people start coming in and saying: "Is this house exempt? Can we get insurance on it?" This is a brand new system. We're working our way through it.

What we've done is worked very closely with the home builders and other agencies to say: "What do you think? You've been building houses here for years. You've been insuring houses here for many years, 30, 40 years. People have been able to buy these protections. What do you think would be a reasonable fee? What's it going to take to get us there?" We believe we've gotten close. If we see down the road that there are places where we can do this better, we're going to look at that, and we're going to try to do it. We want to be fair to all Albertans. I don't believe this is fair. I

believe we have a system that will be fair. I believe it will treat everyone not equally but equitably. At the end of the day, what we want is for buyers to be protected when they make that big investment.

4:50

Let me tell you that you can do a lot of inspections on things, but you will not always get a proper inspection on structural. You will not always get a proper inspection because sometimes it's impossible. You don't always know what the soil conditions are. To say that there are none of these things happening on individual homes, I can tell you that I had people in my office in the last week that are challenged with a huge amount of money that they're looking at because of some structural issues that happened because of soil conditions that the inspector couldn't have seen. But now it's there. We're dealing with it. It's a significant issue. This is a young couple with three kids that have invested everything they've got to try to have a family home. They need a family home. They need the protection. And now we're in a position where you're saying: let's try to figure something else out. I'm saying: work with us. We're going to make this thing work. We've been at it since February.

The one thing that I do appreciate is your mentioning that some of the folks that are on the phones and the front line may not have all of the information. We're training them. I will make sure, when I go back, that folks have the best information so that we can get it to everyone that phones in. I want people to be educated. What I would love to see is that every person that builds a home in the province of Alberta puts insurance on it for the fee that it costs. Then no matter who buys it or if they have to sell it, whether it's a death or a divorce in the family or just financial issues, if that house has to come up for sale – when that young family with three kids walks through the door, they know they can count on the insurance to help them be safe, to have that biggest investment of their life protected. I am going to stand by that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: I think we have a misunderstanding on your law. In the example you gave, that individual that came to your office is already protected under this law. They weren't protected before February 1. They are protected now. You did a good job with the original law in that sense. That's not what we're debating here.

By the way, I do have nothing but individual home builds. I have very few home developments. I'm sorry. Sundre has got one that was built 10 or 12 years ago. The last time Rimbey had a home development build was probably five years ago. You compare that to Edmonton or Calgary; they're popping up all over the place. Those are residential builders. We're not even talking about them.

What we are talking about are the ones that qualify for the exemption, and you're charging them as if they're going to sell their home. They're not. They qualify for the exemption. That's the whole purpose of it. You're asking them to insure their home, and you said that you want everyone to insure their home. Why didn't you just put it into law in the first place? You didn't. You created an exemption, that I think is correct. We do have owner-builders who want to build their own home. They're the ones that are responsible. There's no other builder involved. They're the owner-builder. They're going to live in the home, and their intention is to live there forever.

I have a lot of them. That's why this has come up through my riding. Most of my rural farmers are giving that 20-acre, that 30-

acre cut-off to a son or a daughter to build a house to take over the farm. They're the ones that qualify for the exemption.

The other thing is your example of missing an inspection. What makes you think some government inspector is going to catch it? He's not. If the inspector misses it, the inspector misses it. The fact is that for an owner-builder who's not selling their home, that is their responsibility. By the way, defects show up later, down the road. If that defect shows up beyond 10 years, it doesn't matter whether they're exempt or not. That warranty insurance is gone. It's gone. We know that.

If your intent was that all homes carry this insurance, you didn't put that in legislation, and I think justly so. There are reasons for an exemption. The fact is that what you're trying to do and what it appears that this registration is trying to do is say: "If you don't buy the warranty, you've got to pay an exorbitant fee. You might as well just buy the warranty." Well, actually, that's what we were told. You can shake your head, but I tell you that when you look at the figures, they're not too far apart, so there's a little justification in that.

Now, I will tell you this. I would advise anyone to put the warranty on it because you don't know what's going to happen between now and 10 years. That's what I would advise, but people have a right to make their own choice. The thing is that they are exempt.

What we're asking for is that we can look at this. That fee is nothing but a data entry fee. If you're telling me that you're sending bureaucrats out there to inspect, I don't know what they're going to find if the house is complete. I don't know what they're going to find if the walls are already up and everything is enclosed. They can't look at the plumbing or the electrical. They can't check the framing if the foundation is in and the house is on it.

If you're going to have building inspectors, the way our current system is set up is correct. You pour the foundation, and you don't do anything till the foundation inspector comes out. You frame the building, and before you move on, you get the framing inspector out. You put in your electrical, and then the electrical inspector comes out before you close it all in. That's the process every community uses today. Nothing changes.

What this fee is for is the administrative fee to enter data on a computer. That's all it is. There is a tremendous disparity between the exempt and the nonexempt, and it's wrong. Those people whom you determine – and I'm not telling you who to determine or not. That's your decision; that's the ministry's decision. But when they're exempt, they should be exempt, and I'm asking for a fair fee.

Now, you say that we're not in negotiation. Well, actually, I think we are negotiating. I would rather have no fee whatsoever because they're exempt. They're going to live in there beyond 10 years. It's all moot. But the fact is that you said that you wanted equal. You said that in your debate. So now I've presented you a motion that would treat everybody fairly, and it doesn't set an amount. You still can set your amount in regulation to whatever you decide, but it's universal, and it's fair. That's what this amendment does. We're not haggling over what the amount is; that's for your department to decide. What we're talking about is having it fair universally. That's what we're saying.

All you've created is a bureaucratic system, an IT database, and that's what you have. You're not doing building inspections in any way, shape, or form to issue a permit for occupancy or a permit for approval. You're not doing building inspections for the insurance company; they do their own. Clearly, what we have here, Mr. Minister, is a chance to be equitable, as you said. It

doesn't say equal; it doesn't say equitable. It says: just and fair, that the fee posed certainly won't discriminate. That's what we want. That's what we're asking for. We're asking for some type of equitable, and there's nothing wrong with that because an exempt person and a person that's nonexempt do the exact same thing. They enter it in on a computer, and that's all they do.

If you're telling me that you're sending inspectors out there, you're department doesn't have it right. I will tell you this. It doesn't threaten anyone buying a house. If people try to sell this property before the 10 years, they've got to get the insurance, the way the law is set up – no ifs, ands, or buts about it – or they can't sell the house. So you have that base covered.

Your example that you brought up earlier does not apply to this amendment. Those people are covered as of February 1. That's why the law was brought forward. All this is trying to do is create some sort of equitable fee that everyone pays to register their property, whether they're exempt or nonexempt. It doesn't set the amount; you get to set the amount.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, this is kind of proving the point about why you should read the legislation and not just the press release. I went and looked at the original legislation, and in fact it does exempt the owner-builder. It gives the definition of an owner-builder as “an individual who builds or intends to build a new home for personal use with a valid authorization issued by the Registrar and includes any builder prescribed as an owner-builder to which this Act applies.”

Then it starts out:

A person other than an owner-builder shall not build a new home unless the new home

- (a) is covered by a home warranty insurance contract that complies with [the subsections] and
- (b) is registered with the Registrar.

And then it goes on. You can't sell it unless you've got the home warranty on it or you've got a disclosure notice that's satisfactory to the registrar. So my memory of what this was about is actually not being held up by what's actually here.

5:00

I'll tell you, Mr. Minister, that what surprised me was when I heard the amounts. I think the first time I heard it, it was \$75. But okay; I'll take it now that it's \$95 for a developer, if I can call them that, who's building a number of homes and then selling them to the first person to officially own the home. But I understood from the first time around that the owner-builder would also be required to have the insurance. They would be required to build it. But as I look through this now – and I'll admit that I'm only eight pages in; I might have missed the section – it looks like an exemption was given to the owner-builder. Not a great idea.

Where I'll disagree with my hon. colleague: I think the home warranty is not necessarily about the first person that owns it. It's not necessarily about the owner-builder, the family with three kids that the minister was referring to. In the case of the owner-builder I think the protection is for the next people that buy it. And if nobody buys it, fine. Fine. If the first people to build it live in it for 45 years, fine, but they need to have the insurance for the next people that buy it.

Mr. Anglin: Ten years.

Ms Blakeman: It's only good for 10 years. I know that. But I'll tell you that with the number of houses that turn over in my constituency, it'll get used.

Let me just go to the crux of what my concern is here. I was really surprised to hear the amount that the government was now considering charging to the owner-builder versus the amount that was being charged to the developer. I remember at the time going: whoa. It's, like, 600 and something dollars.

An Hon. Member: Seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Ms Blakeman: Seven hundred and fifty dollars. Okay.

So it's \$95 for a developer, and they're building a development with 10 places in it, so 950 bucks. For a single person who's, you know, probably trying to do things carefully if they're building their own home – you know, granted, some people, my neighbour, in fact, who owns a development company and is now building his own home: he could probably afford that amount of money. But I find that a lot of people that build their own home are being very careful with their money, and all of a sudden they're paying – okay. Who's done the old math? How many times more is that, those of you that memorized your multiplication tables?

An Hon. Member: What are the two numbers?

Ms Blakeman: Ninety-five and 750.

Mr. Wilson: Eight.

Ms Blakeman: Eight times more, according to the old math.

That's a lot more for an individual, and that's where I'm struggling with this. One, I thought that the owner-builder would be included in the legislation and would have to get something, not be exempt. It sounds like they're automatically exempt rather than automatically included. Two, the difference in the amount that is being charged to the individuals is a jaw-dropper.

Now, I think that at one point somebody over there – how's that for specificity? – said that this had to do with actuarial tables and that the likelihood is that the owner-builder stuff is just going to cost more because it's one building as compared to what a developer is doing with many buildings. I'm really struggling to accept that it's eight times more for an individual builder. I'll tell you that it sounds like too much, even just to my ear. If you haven't already decided on that, please re-examine it. I think you've created a barrier there that you don't need to have. If you have already decided, well, you know, there are amending acts, and we could certainly be doing something with that.

Two things that I was looking for were that the owner-builder would also be required to have the insurance and – I'm probably speaking against your amendment, aren't I?

Mr. Anglin: Doesn't matter. They're going to vote against it.

Ms Blakeman: It doesn't matter. Okay.

So everybody would have the insurance. That was the point. To me, it's not necessarily the first owner; it's the other people that are in six, eight years later.

Secondly, that amount that you have for the owner-builder I think is too high. It's like a mental block. You know, you charge \$9.99 for something, and people are okay with it. You charge 10 bucks, and: “No. That's too expensive.” It's the way people react to that amount of money. My experience has been that people that are owner-builders are watching their pennies, and all of a sudden they're going to get dinged for \$750. That's a lot of money, you know, when you're an owner-builder. Yes? Yes.

Mr. Campbell: Not in Alberta. That's for \$400,000 or \$500,000 houses.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I don't know what the average of homes across Alberta is. It's actually more than that in Edmonton-Centre. You'd be hard pressed to find a decent condo for that.

But it's that extra stuff that just nickels you to death, and it makes people crazy. What I don't want to see is people trying to get around it or, you know, defaulting or not paying or whatever the heck. I want this program to work. I want it to be easy to get at. I want people to sign up for it. I think there's a barrier that's been created here.

If I may just also comment on why you end up with cascading amendments. Since you have not had the delight of being on this side of the House, just let me explain it to you briefly. We try hard to get what we want, and we have to work with Parliamentary Counsel, who tells us: you know, you can ask for this, and if you don't get it, then you can step it down and ask for that. So, clearly, if you want something really badly, that's what you're going to do, which is why on bills that are really important to members of the opposition you're going to get cascading amendments. We're trying to get something out of it. We're trying to save it.

Sometimes I walk up the hill to do great things, and sometimes I walk up the hill to stop the government from doing quite so much bad. When you're dealing with a bill that you think is pretty bad and you're trying to make it less bad because you guys are going to implement it, how do I work with you to make it less bad? You're going to get cascading amendments from me because I'm going to keep trying to get that change in place. Of course, I'm having to deal down every time I do it. I wanted nothing. Then I'm going: "Well, okay. This amount. Well, okay. A little bit higher." That's why you get it, and it's not a bad thing. To defend my colleague, I know you're irritated by it. You clearly were, but that's why we do things over here, because you're kind of a stubborn wall to deal with, so I'm going to come at you more than once.

Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: We're still on that amendment, are we?

Ms Blakeman: The second amendment.

Mr. Mason: The second amendment. Okay.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, to answer the hon. member's question, everyone so far in this debate has brought up the subject of protecting the buyer. I understand that. What you're missing is that – and the hon. member from the fantastic constituency of Edmonton-Centre . . .

Mr. Wilson: Fabulous.

Mr. Anglin: Fabulous.

Again, if you read the bill, the original act, what it says is that "subject to subsection (5), a person shall not sell or offer to sell a new home while" it's either "being constructed or during the purchase period." If you look at the amendment that we're bringing, we're changing "purchase period" to "the duration" and I think "protection period." So the protection period is the 10-year envelope.

Nobody can sell a home within that 10 years that doesn't have the liability. That is in law now. So when you say that you're protecting the buyer, the buyer is protected, even if the person building the home is exempt. They cannot sell that home within 10 years without a liability. It is the law, so you're covered. What we're looking for is some sort of equitable fee here. I know they get it, but I've got to make a big statement from my constituents. I'm getting a lot of phone calls on this. That's what it is. [interjection] I know, but they love me for it.

5:10

The point is that if you're concerned about the buyer, the law is quite specific. The buyer is protected. Actually, if there are any holes in this law – we haven't covered those holes – they have to do with apartment buildings. Those are still complex in many ways, and that's where things can get dicey. But on the single-family home where people are exempt, you cannot sell that house. It's against the law to sell that house if it's not covered by a warranty insurance. The only one that gets the exemption is the homeowner-builder, who's going to live in it. If they try to sell it, they've got to have the warranty insurance. It's the law. So the buyers are protected.

What's unfair is that the homeowner-builder that qualifies for the exemption is being unfairly taxed, and they're getting no value for that extra fee. It's not there. All the inspections are done by other jurisdictions, and those are valid inspections. I have no idea what a government bureaucrat will see or do if they come out after the whole place is complete, particularly if it's two years down the road and there's absolutely no indication and there's no requirement for anyone to come out. It's not in legislation. So, clearly, we have some correcting to do, but the first step in correcting is making sure we have equitable fees.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that wish to speak on amendment A2?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the bill, Bill 6.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on Bill 6.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to just make a few comments, and then I have an amendment as well. I just wanted to make a comment about the necessity for this particular bill. The New Home Buyer Protection Act was passed in the previous session and officially went into effect on February 1, 2014. That is this year. It's a brand new piece of legislation, and we're already back trying to fix what was wrong with it.

Now, Madam Chair, during that debate the New Democrat opposition and, I believe, other opposition parties as well introduced a number of amendments to that bill to try and correct the obvious deficiencies that it had. These amendments were rejected by the government, and as a result they passed a bill that was woefully inadequate.

So now we are back again with this bill, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014. The ink on the original bill is not even dry yet, and the government is already back to the drawing board because they didn't do the job right the first time. If they'd actually work in a little bit more co-operative relationship with opposition parties when it comes to these kinds of pieces of legislation, I think we would be farther ahead, and I think the

place we're in would be more productive. I think people would be better served.

We also have ideas, and we also listen to our constituents and try to relay their views in these debates. When the government routinely ignores the opposition and its amendments only to reintroduce similar amendments later on after bills are already put into force, I think it really undermines the government's claim to actually be listening. If they're not listening here, they're probably not listening out there either, Madam Chair.

I have an amendment here, which I will convey to you, and then I will await your instruction on when to introduce it.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while we hand the amendment out to all the members. This amendment will be known as amendment A3.

Hon member, would you like to proceed on amendment A3, please?

Mr. Mason: I would like to do so, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. I am moving on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be amended as follows. In part A section 4 is amended by adding the following after clause (b):

- (b.1) in subsection (6) as follows:
 - (i) in clause (a) by striking out "one year" and substituting "2 years";
 - (ii) in clause (c) by striking out "5" and substituting "10".

In part B section 6 is amended in the proposed section 4(2) as follows:

- (a) in clause (a) by striking out "one year" and substituting "2 years";
- (b) in clause (c) by striking out "5" and substituting "10".

Now, I'll just take a few moments to address this. These are similar amendments to the ones that we proposed when the legislation was originally introduced. They increase the amount of required coverage on materials and labour as well as defects in the building envelope. They amend amounts both in the original bill, by inserting a paragraph, and the amendment bill. We also mentioned our concerns to ministerial staff during the briefing on this bill.

In consultation with experts and in looking at some of the examples of building failures both here and in other jurisdictions, especially B.C. with the leaky condo crisis they've experienced, we see a serious need for longer coverage periods.

There are two aspects of the coverage periods we're addressing here. The first is materials and labour. The rationale is that in new buildings the coverage period, which is short right now at only one year, may start long before an owner actually moves in, and that means that the actual period the owner has for discovering the issues in the new build can actually be very short. By extending that period to two years, we give more of a cushion for that move-in period of time to elapse and a new homeowner to still have time to find issues and seek a solution.

The second aspect, Madam Chair, is extending the building envelope. We think this is really a critical issue, and five years seems far too short for coverage. Failure in a building envelope means that the building winds up rotting. The whole side needs to be ripped apart, windows are covered up with shrink wrap, and the total cost for repairs winds up being in the tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Our concern originally was brought to the issue by Professor Tang Lee, an architecture professor focused on building envelopes

at the University of Calgary for over 35 years. He has consulted on leaky condos and acted as an expert witness in a number of cases. The concern he had is that the building envelope issues often don't turn up until the siding has been breached. Then mould or rot sets in, a process that can take time and years, often much longer than the five years that the act currently covers. We've seen time and again the time it takes to come up here and in B.C.

In British Columbia the leaky condo crisis has cost billions of dollars in repairs, more than 20 years since the first issue came up and standards were improved. Condos built prior to the improved standards were still showing up with new problems. It might take even longer for problems with the envelope to surface here, because we have lower levels of rainfall and humidity, but we have seen it come up here past that five-year mark. At the Palisades condo owners were hit with a \$6 million repair bill for a leaky envelope in a seven-year-old building. At Glenora Gates an eight-year-old building needed \$5 million in repairs for leaks. Really, again, we're just trying to make sure here that Albertans get the protection that they need when they buy a home. With envelope issues, especially, that means we need to see longer coverage periods mandated, not just optional, where consumers may not be aware of the full extent of the risk they take.

Madam Chair, those are my arguments in favour of this legislation. It simply extends the coverage period to find defects. Particularly, with respect to the building envelope, the evidence is clear that five years is not enough and that many problems emerge after the five-year period is up. They are massively expensive repair jobs when you're talking about repairs to the long-term damage to the envelope that may have continued undetected for a number of years. I think that if the government is truly interested in protecting homebuyers with respect to the construction of condos and homes and so on, they would gladly support this amendment. I consider it to be something that would actually enhance the bill considerably and, I think, protect buyers, which is the avowed intention of the bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

5:20

The Deputy Chair: You're welcome, hon. member. Thank you.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. I'll just make a real quick mention. As you know, this is increasing the minimum. This bill sets the minimum standards for protection, Madam Chair. We work very closely with the insurance industry. As you increase the minimums, you start to increase the cost of every home, and in low-cost housing and others, it could create a very untenable situation.

All of these coverages are available by paying the extra. Someone can go in and ask to have the higher coverage, and they can purchase them. But to force everyone to pay that much more to have much higher coverage when we're not even sure of the value that they would be, Madam Chair, I believe would be wrong. We're trying to keep it both affordable and protective of the citizens that are buying these homes.

So Madam Chair, I will be voting against this, and I would ask all my colleagues to do so as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, I mean, if I hadn't been here so long, I wouldn't have believed what I just heard. In actual fact, what is more expensive is having to make major repairs to a condo or a home because the protection isn't

there? The minister poses as if he's defending lower housing costs, but in actual fact it's clear that he's merely defending builders from taking legitimate responsibility to guarantee that their product is sound. I don't think anybody who heard that speech would really believe that rejecting this amendment is about saving money for homebuyers.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on Bill 6, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014. Are there any other members who wish to speak?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Hon. members, we're moving on. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Madam Chair. I'd ask the House for unanimous consent to move on to Committee of the Whole for Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The Government House Leader has requested that we move to . . . [An electronic device sounded] We just had a phone call. We're moving normally to that anyway, so we didn't need to ask for consent.

Bill 7

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise, having made a commitment at second reading that I would try to address some of the questions that were raised by members. I think I'm prepared to do that now. Maybe it will facilitate the balance of the debate at Committee of the Whole if I proceed with that.

A couple of things, not necessarily in sequential order. The Member for Edmonton-Centre wanted to know about the tax rates on the QETs. The tax rate is the same as the Alberta corporate tax rate, which is 10 per cent.

Now, the second part of that question was – and I think there were several members that asked this – are companies going to be getting a tax break now on QETs that they used then to save for reclamation costs? Actually, what happens here is that the regime simply shifts that tax burden from the corporation to the QET. What happens is that both entities pay the tax, and then there's a tax credit that's issued to the corporation, so that eliminates the double tax that would otherwise occur as both the corporation and the QET are required to pay tax on the same QET income.

Corporations are currently allowed to deduct their QET contributions in computing that income, and these amendments don't change any of that.

There were also some questions that were raised, again, I believe, by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, around: who pays in a bankruptcy situation? Will the QETs protect against oil companies that go bankrupt? In essence, if the company goes bankrupt, the money that's been accumulated in the QET is protected. Money can only be pulled out of the QETs for site reclamation purposes, so no other uses under the act that establishes the QETs.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre also indicated that she was uncertain about the mechanics of the tax regime, asking the question: was it just more tax breaks for corporations? In fact, the net tax impact, as I think I alluded to earlier, of the QET regime is actually absolutely neutral. I went through that, I think, in the context of how that works.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View wondered what the legislation did to provide assurance that the reclamation costs are covered off and do not fall into the public purse. That's actually not applicable to the conversation here, nor were questions around whether or not the trusts covered downstream oil and gas cleanup costs and that type of thing. That, obviously, as I alluded to in my closing comments in second reading, would fall under the regulatory oversight of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

The same member wanted to know how trusts qualify. The eligibility rules for those QETs are actually set out in the Income Tax Act of Canada, so it's not Alberta-based legislation that establishes the rules, so to speak, in terms of qualifying as a trust. That's the CRA, and those criteria are clearly defined there.

Then the same member spoke about the cleanup costs with respect to the oil sands being reflected here. The QET regulatory regime, which covers off which costs must be covered, would again fall under the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked questions around: how many firms are in operation in Alberta that would meet the definition of a small single project? I don't have an answer for you relative to that. In fact, the next question was: how many of these qualifying environmental trusts are currently in place in Alberta, how many more are anticipated as a result of the implementation of this legislation, and what impact would that have on increasing the number? The answer is that this is, in fact, a new regime. We're currently not aware of any qualifying environmental trust having been established in the province of Alberta at this time, but we are expecting that there will be a handful of pipeline-related qualifying environmental trusts that would be established in the very near term in Alberta now that pipeline corporations are required to use these QETs. So none today, as far as we know; some in the near future, probably specifically in that area of pipeline corporations establishing them.

5:30

We also would anticipate and should note that oil sands corporations will likely also use this QET mechanism given that they are supportive in the discussions and, obviously, would likely benefit from the opportunity to establish those in Alberta. Given that it's just being introduced, we're really not sure how many of these QETs would be expected in the long term, but I think that with just those two general ideas, one can establish somewhat of an idea of what the uptake on that will likely be.

The same member asked questions around safeguards that would be in place to ensure that tax avoidance by corporations

wouldn't happen by them using a QET to avoid tax. In fact, the federal government, obviously, would enforce the QET eligibility requirements, and to qualify for a QET for Alberta-specific purposes, first a trust would have to meet those federal requirements. I think that to the degree that you would accept that as assurance, that is the safeguard.

The same member, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, also asked about the safeguards to make sure that money isn't removed from the trust and taken out and then perhaps used for purposes other than reclamation. Again, the Income Tax Act of Canada prescribes that money can only be removed from the QET to pay for reclamation as prescribed, and I think that inside that act there are a series of criteria around how those funds would have to be used specifically for reclamation.

Then there were questions regarding whether it would be large corporations that would use QETs or who specifically as an entity might use those. In fact, all corporations of any size are eligible to establish QETs provided that they can meet the eligibility criteria.

Then the same member was observing around what the appropriate corporate tax rate was. Of course, that's not the basis of the discussion that we're having here, but I appreciate you raising that. I think I've heard that somewhere previously. I'm not sure where I might have picked up something like that.

To the members: I hope that that addresses the questions that were raised in second reading. You know, if there's more requirement for information during Committee of the Whole, I'll do my best to see if we can get that on a timely basis.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 7, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Now we will rise and report.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Mr. Jeneroux: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 6 and Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thanks, Madam Speaker. Let's call it 6 o'clock, and we'll adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:36 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 17, 2014

Issue 20

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 17, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. members, let us pray. Dear Lord, may our spoken prayers be answered for those who cannot speak for themselves, and may our actions be of help for those who cannot act on their own. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a significant year for the Canadian armed forces, and we join all Canadians to extend our deepest gratitude for their courage and sacrifice to protect our freedom and the freedom of others. It is my distinct honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 10 representatives from the highly honoured Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, fondly known as Patricias, here in recognition of 100 years of contribution to the defence and security of Canada in war and peacetime.

My honoured guests are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for that honour. I would ask that they please rise and remain standing as I introduce each of them: Lieutenant Colonel Nick Grimshaw, commanding officer of 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry and chairman of the Regimental Executive Committee; Master Warrant Officer Gordon George, quartermaster sergeant instructor for 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry; Major Harpal Mandahar, project director, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 100th anniversary; Warrant Officer Chris Durette, sergeant major for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 100th anniversary office; Master Warrant Officer Curtis Hollister, sergeant major B company, 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry; Sergeant Shelldon Hawman, section commander, A company, 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry; Master Corporal Byron Crowhurst, weapons detachment commander, C company, 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry; Corporal Brent Baron, light armoured vehicle driver for the commanding officer, 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry; Corporal Kevin Koldeweihe, storeman, recce platoon, 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of the Patricia's slogan, Always a Patricia, I introduce Sergeant Major Tim Turner, former member, 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, currently serving in the Premier's executive protection unit.

I would now ask that the Assembly join me in honouring my guests. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to introduce or, perhaps more correctly, reintroduce to you and through you to all members of this House a person who has made an important commitment to renew democracy in the House of Commons. He is the former MLA for Calgary-West, former Minister of Education, former minister of

health and wellness, former Minister of Energy, and former Minister of Finance. Last weekend he won, by a landslide, reportedly, a hard-fought nomination campaign for the federal constituency of Calgary Signal Hill. He is a spirited Albertan, an opinionated contributor, who may well have eloquently, verbally sparred with nearly everyone in this House at one time or another. We are confident that he will be representing Albertans effectively in Ottawa. Please welcome Ron Liepert, now standing in the members' gallery.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am so very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of absolutely incredible and energetic kids from one of my very favourite schools, Leo Nickerson elementary school, from my constituency in St. Albert. Leo Nickerson is an incredible school – both of my children are proud alumni of Leo Nickerson elementary school – and accompanying them today are some incredible, amazing educators: Laura Banu; Marin Thomas, also affectionately known as Mille Thomas; and Ben Schepens. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that the students and teachers from Leo Nickerson please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly l'école Citadelle elementary school from Legal, located not too far north of here in my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. They are accompanied by their teacher, M. Chris Page, and a parent helper, Melanie Thibault. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fantastic group of students and parents from Plamondon. They are joined today by their teacher, Karen Lavoie, and parent helpers Michelle Ewaske and Julie Lemieux. I'd like to ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly excited students from Bowden Grandview school. This is the same school that my brother graduated from as well. These 22 grade 6 students are clearly eager to learn all about the Legislature and the democratic process. They're joined today by two teachers, Ms Tracy Dreher and Ms Brenda Sherwood, and 10 parent helpers. I'd like to offer them the warm welcome of this Assembly. Please stand and receive this welcome.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let's move on with other important guests, starting with the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. April is Daffodil Month, a time when Albertans unite in the fight against cancer. We wear yellow daffodils to raise awareness for those who are affected by cancer. Prevention is crucial in the fight against cancer and starts with a healthy lifestyle, physical activity, healthy food choices, and staying tobacco free. With us today are some very special guests, who have joined us in recognition of this important initiative, and I would ask them to rise as I state their names: Dr. John Mercer, who has over 30 years of experience as a cancer researcher and is currently a professor on the faculty of medicine at the U of A; as well as Angeline Webb, a policy analyst who has worked for the Canadian Cancer Society for 10 years; and then Tim Buckland, a truly inspirational Albertan. He's a three-time cancer survivor who was diagnosed at 18 and two times at the age of 21. He underwent three surgeries, four months of chemotherapy, and was pronounced cancer free seven years ago this April. Wouldn't you know it? He now works for the Canadian Cancer Society. I would ask all of our members to extend a very warm welcome to all of our visitors here.

1:40

The Speaker: The Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great honour for me to introduce two people that are very special to me. Some 34 years back, in veterinary school, I was Charlie Brown, and she was the little red-headed girl.

Mr. Quest: And she pulled the football away?

Dr. Starke: She did pull the football away more than once, but that was Lucy.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, since that time she's become my wife, my business partner, my confidante, the mother to my two sons. She's done that for nearly 30 years and for that probably should receive some sort of recognition. My wife, Alison.

Mr. Speaker, the other person I've only known for, actually, a couple of years, but over that period of time she's become a good friend and a trusted adviser. I know that she's been that to many people who've passed through this august Chamber in her nearly three decades of dedicated public service to the people of Alberta. That period of public service comes to a conclusion today. I will tell you that it has been my pleasure to work with her, and I know that she will do well regardless of what she goes into next although I know what it is. I'm now going to ask my chief of staff, Tammy Forbes, and my wife, Alison Starke, to please stop planning what I'm to do next and stand up and receive the recognition of the House.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also with a mix of joy and sadness that I want to introduce my executive assistant from Calgary, Jenna Shummoogum, and her mother, Jaya. Jenna has been with me for three years, has been stalwart and energetic, artistic, passionate about her work. She's now moving on to even greater work with another poverty group, the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association. I'd like them to both stand and get the appropriate response.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Bruce Kyereh-Addo, who is a researcher with our caucus, and his lovely companion. Bruce has added great value to our team, and we appreciate him being here to watch the proceedings of the House today. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have two minutes each.

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 100th Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Their service has been integral to every 20th-century war and military conflict in which Canada has participated, including notorious World War I battles such as Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele; battlefronts in Sicily, Italy, and western Europe in World War II; Korea and Germany, as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; United Nations' peace-keeping operations; Yugoslavia; and Afghanistan.

Named for Princess Patricia, granddaughter of Queen Victoria and daughter of Prince Arthur, Governor General of Canada, the regiment was raised in 1914 in Ottawa and 100 years later serves with an unchanged mission, to provide an excellent infantry regiment for service to Canada. The regiment is composed of three regular force battalions and a reserve battalion, three of which are located in Edmonton. The colonel-in-chief of the Patricias is former Governor General of Canada the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Queen's Privy Council for Canada, companion of the Order of Canada, commander of the Order of Military Merit, commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Canadian Forces Decoration, who in 2007 became the first Canadian installed to this position.

With regret more than 1,850 Patricias have fallen in service, indeed the ultimate sacrifice. The renowned regiment has received numerous battle honours and exemplifies their unofficial motto of First in the Field. Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the families, who were kissed goodbye and left miles behind but whose sustaining presence was carried onto foreign soil in the hearts and memories of the regiment. It is with sincere admiration that I commend the valour of the Patricias, the sacrifices and achievements made by those who have served and continue to serve during times of war and peace, creating an enduring legacy of military professionalism, courage, distinction, and honour.

Congratulations, Patricias, on your 100th anniversary. God bless.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Women's Equality Rights

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Mid-April has two special meanings for me. One is Law Day, as celebrated by the bar associations across Canada. It was on April 17, 1982, that Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau – yes – signed the Charter, thereby guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms for all Canadians.

Now, in honour of this milestone the Canadian Bar Association introduced Law Day in 1983 as a means to commemorate the event and educate the public about the legal system. The Alberta branch of the Canadian Bar Association works in co-operation with and with funding from the Alberta Law Foundation and the Law Society to organize events across the province, including in courthouses in Calgary, Edmonton, Drumheller, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Wetaskiwin, and St. Paul.

Members of this House and anyone who gets within 10 feet of me will hear how important it is for every woman and for every other group that has systemically experienced discrimination to have section 15 and section 28 of the Charter. This is a sacred day for me.

On April 19, 1916, Alberta passed An Act to Provide for Equal Suffrage, which gave white women the right to vote in Alberta. Women of colour had to wait for some time, and aboriginal women didn't get the vote until the 1960s.

So two days on the calendar, two critically important days for women in Alberta and Canada.

I need to take this opportunity to thank LEAF, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund. The founding mothers of this organization pounded the halls of Canada's Parliament to make sure that women and others got those equality rights. They wouldn't have had them otherwise. They badgered, cajoled, argued, yelled, and sweet-talked every parliamentarian into it.

This is a good time to make a donation, a big one, to the organization in your life who upholds your equality rights.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Alzheimer's Face Off Hockey Tournament

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend I took part in the 2014 Alzheimer's Face Off in the beautiful city of Leduc. Alzheimer's is a disease of the brain that affects men and women of all races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is not a normal part of aging. No one is immune. Symptoms include having difficulty remembering things, making decisions, and performing everyday activities. These changes can affect the way a person feels and acts. There is currently no way to stop the disease, but research is improving the way we provide care, and we'll continue to search for a cure.

Mr. Speaker, the continued search for a cure could not occur without events and initiatives like the Alzheimer's Face Off. The Face Off tournament saw teams paired with former NHL players such as Theo Fleury, Marty McSorley, Sean Brown, and others. This weekend also included a Face Off luncheon with hockey legends Frank Mahovlich, Garry Unger, Paul Coffey, and Alex Delvecchio.

I'd like to acknowledge Greg Christenson for his incredible efforts in making this happen. Even more than his hockey prowess, Greg was a major fundraiser that put our team in a position to acquire Russ Courtnall as our NHL draft player. Our team, the NHL All-Stars, was very well managed by our bench boss. That would be you, Mr. Speaker. Along with myself and the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and former MLA Art Johnston, we put in a gritty effort on the ice.

Mr. Speaker, this event raised \$1.2 million for Alzheimer's. I would like to send a big thank you to all the volunteers and

players who helped to raise these much-needed funds for a great cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. We'll commence in just a second. A reminder that you have 35 seconds for the questions, 35 seconds for the answers. Let's be mindful of civility and decorum today, please.

Let's start with the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

1:50

Public Service Pensions

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the PC government has once again resorted to bullying our public-sector unions rather than negotiating in good faith. Instead of getting a deal on pension reforms through tough but fair negotiations with union leaders, the PCs are again bringing down the legislative hammer, potentially smashing apart pension arrangements that thousands of Alberta front-line workers have built their future plans on. To the Finance minister: does he not see that these heavy-handed tactics will make future negotiations even harder?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the hon. member opposite, who doesn't believe in defined benefit plans, we actually want to maintain the pension promise of the defined benefit plan. That's what we talked about to all of the plan board members in July of 2012 and have been talking to them ever since July of 2012. The AUPE, or the union leadership, are not the members that are on the plan boards. The plan boards are the people that we have been talking to because they represent the members of the pensions. She would do well to learn that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we fully support sustainable, defined pension plans.

The government is fond of stating that pension plans as they're structured are unaffordable and that changes must be made, but that point is certainly up for debate. Recent reports by credible firms have cast doubt on the government's position, and even the intergovernmental affairs minister has said that the problem will solve itself. To the Finance minister: why is this government forging ahead with these changes when the jury is still out on whether they're actually needed?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General believes that they're needed; the actuaries believe that they're needed. In fact, the plan boards themselves, even on the LAPP website, still suggest that there is unsustainability in the plan that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing. The Twitter piece here is really quite interesting because the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on Twitter in May 2012 actually said, and I quote: we will not support a defined benefit pension plan. So I guess they're changing because they think there are votes there or something. Unbelievable.

Ms Smith: I think that was that we would not support a defined benefit pension plan for MLAs when they were trying to . . . [interjections]

Albertans are simply no longer getting good, honest government from this tired PC dynasty. As if their reckless approach to bills 45 and 46 wasn't enough, they're now going for broke with these premature and unnecessary changes to pension plans that will impact 200,000 workers. The Wildrose would repeal Bill 45 and

Bill 46, and if the PCs keep it up on Bill 9, we'll repeal that one, too. To the Premier: will he put the brakes on these pension changes and once and for all concede that the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it just goes to show that they're going to say that they're going to repeal whatever will get them votes. Unfortunately, even their Finance critic said: around the world pensions are going bankrupt, and so if we don't do something, we'd better do some better accounting on how we're going to pay for this one; that's what we risk. The point that I am driving at here is that this government is actually saying that we want to do something to save the pensions for the future employees of this government, for future Albertans. The changes we're making are modest. All of the other pensions across the country are doing similar things or even more drastic things. We have been communicating with plan members to say that this is to save the pension promise.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. leader, the second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. They should be respecting contracts and negotiating fairly.

Former Premier's Travel to Jasper

Ms Smith: On Friday, June 28, 2013, the cabinet declared its first-ever provincial state of emergency to deal with the High River flood. That same day the former Premier went to Jasper to stay at a luxury resort for the weekend. That weekend was when residents of High River first got to see how devastated their town was. Hundreds of dedicated government workers, including a few cabinet ministers, were struggling to get the first of the residents of High River back into their homes. Who was the Premier meeting with in Jasper while this was going on?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if my recollection serves me correctly, that's exactly the same question the hon. member asked yesterday, and I'd give her exactly the same answer. Well, probably not exactly the same answer because I can't remember my answer. I wasn't listening to it.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the former Premier did a lot of work on that flight. She was everywhere on that flight. She was very, very much leading this government in assuring Albertans that their interests would be taken care of with respect to the damages that they sustained in that flood, and many of the rest of us were on the ground doing the same thing.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that you shouldn't use taxpayer dollars for personal gain. If the former Premier really had meetings in Jasper that weekend, then there is no issue, but if there were no meetings, then it appears that taxpayer dollars were used for a personal vacation, and that is not acceptable. In fact, it's also illegal. Is the Premier covering up misconduct by refusing to tell Albertans what the former Premier was doing in Jasper that weekend?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, throwing out wild accusations may be what this hon. member considers to be good opposition or good government, but it's not what the people of Alberta expect from her or from anyone else in opposition. [interjection] There are many real, important issues to be discussed for this province, but she can make up things, taking one set of facts, make up some

allegations, and then ask us to go and look and tell her what the answers behind them are.

What was the Premier doing on June 15 of last year? [interjection] What was she doing on June 1 of last year? Mr. Speaker, it's not for me to go and look back at the calendar every day to satisfy her curiosity.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, hon. Member for Airdrie, I see your names on the list. I'd be happy to leave them on the list. I'd be happy to withdraw them. If you continue to interrupt, I will.

Let's go on with your second supplemental, please.

Ms Smith: Yes, it is.

If this Premier knows something untoward has happened, he owes it to Albertans to tell them. Not telling them is tantamount to covering it up. If this Premier refuses to answer, we will have no choice but to ask the RCMP to investigate whether taxpayer dollars were used to pay for a Jasper resort vacation for the former Premier. This Premier can clear the air right now. Did the former Premier actually have any legitimate business to justify being in Jasper at taxpayers' expense that weekend?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have already advised the House that I have no information with respect to that, and I'm not about to scurry and get information with respect to that. The Auditor General is looking into the travel policy and the expense policy and has access to all the information and will report in due course. What I do know of that weekend is that there was somebody who was getting in the way of the law, and that was that hon. member, who refused to be evacuated from High River at a very serious time, setting a very bad example for her constituents.

The Speaker: A point of order from Airdrie has been noted at 1:58. Thank you.

Let's go on. Third main set of questions. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Anderson: You're going to defend her to the ground? Like, what are you doing, Premier?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, I've given the floor to your leader.

Mr. Anderson: The Premier is talking, too.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Anderson: The Premier is talking, too.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Anderson: And you work both ways, not just one way.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, please. I'm trying to talk to you, and I don't appreciate your indignation at the moment. I understand who was giving an answer, and I saw who was interrupting, and it was you. Then the bantering started. I'm going to you first, and I'll ask the Premier also the same. Please, we have 35 seconds for a question; we have 35 seconds for an answer. Let's show some respect for each other and, in particular, for your own leader from the Wildrose.

Hon. Member for Highwood, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, you have the floor for your third and final main set of questions.

FOIP Request Process

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier was asked about the process by which freedom of information requests are reviewed and vetted by his ministry. When asked to confirm that there was no political interference in information requests, he commented that the Deputy Minister of Executive Council reviewed them as a matter of efficiency. Can the Premier explain how this is done?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I did inquire, actually. What I'm advised is that there was some time ago a FOIP request for all of the headlines of all of the ARs in government. Now, I'm not sure the people who made that request understand how many perhaps millions of documents that might be across government and various departments. So the executive head of government, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, requested the FOIP coordinators across government to do a co-ordinated approach with respect to that and to ensure that there were no cabinet documents being released as part of that request, a perfectly appropriate exercise.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we now know that the Premier's office is creating weekly FOIP summary reports. The Premier was also asked: who sees these reports? Is it the Premier, another minister, or their political staff, and what exactly are they shown? Now, the Premier didn't actually answer that question. Are there any cabinet ministers or their political staff reviewing the list of freedom of information requests from the media or the opposition parties?

2:00

Mr. Hancock: Not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we don't even know who has actually made a FOIP request because that information is not available. I'm not aware of any cabinet minister who reviews the weekly report. That is an administrative function. There is a process by which the deputy minister of Executive Council has asked for a co-ordination of certain types of FOIP requests so that there can be a common dissemination of information in an appropriate manner and a co-ordination of the way in which those requests are handled.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it comes down to this. Freedom of information exists to prevent the government from suppressing damaging information about their mistakes. The process is supposed to work free of political interference; however, it appears that the cabinet has found ways to insert themselves in it. Will the Premier assure us that no one in his cabinet is undermining the integrity and independence of the freedom of information process?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Environmental Agency Appointment

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the first points of order I argued in this House was against the former environment minister Dr. Lorne Taylor for calling me a water witch. I won. He withdrew and apologized. Now I'm shaking my

head. He has been appointed as the chair of the industry-funded, now responsible for it all Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency. It's irony, old boys' club, and a Hail Mary pass all wrapped into one. To the minister of environment: did the minister not understand the optics of appointing a Tory insider – that Tory insider – who actively campaigned against . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I don't have any issue with the fact that Dr. Lorne Taylor was made chairman of the board. It was an open competition. He went through an interview process like everybody else did. I look at the chair and vice-chair of the board, I look at the members that we've just appointed, and we have a world-class board that will provide world-class results and monitoring as well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Back to the same minister. Given that a lot of damage can be done to Alberta's environmental image in a year – think dead ducks – I'm wondering if the minister intends to stand behind Dr. Taylor for the requested year he's asked for, no matter what happens.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, what Dr. Taylor said, you know, was to judge him after a year, after we've had a chance to do some work with the board. I can tell you that the environment is very important to this government. It's about market access, getting our products to market. We know that the world is watching us. We are continuing to do a better job in environmental monitoring. We're continuing to do a better job in reclamation. We continue to do a better job with our First Nations and Métis people on this land, basically, to get them involved in monitoring. I am very confident that we will continue to do a good job and that all Albertans will be proud of the environmental record of this government in the coming year.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. Given that the reporting done by Dr. Taylor as the chair is to the minister and not to the Legislature and is at intervals determined by the minister and given the aforementioned, shall I say, skepticism from me, would the minister agree to implement a quarterly reporting schedule for the first year and agree to release those reports publicly?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that any time the hon. member wants to come and talk to me about the environmental monitoring agency, she's allowed to do so. I'll sit down and have lunch with her, and we can talk about any questions or any concerns she has.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, leader of the ND opposition.

Public Service Pensions

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the hallmarks of this PC government is its habit of walking away from a disagreement and using its legislative power to impose its will. Bills 19, 36, and 50 overrode landowners' rights; bills 45 and 46 overrode the rights of government employees. Now once again the government is at it. Why are you once again resorting to

legislation to override the pension rights of Albertans in public service, Mr. Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm going to come back to the discussions that we've had with the plan boards dating back to July 2012. We are taking these steps in order to maintain the defined benefit nature of the plans while keeping the contribution rate increases as low as possible. Even the Auditor General, in Public Accounts, has identified that the contribution rates that our employees currently have are continuing to grow to unacceptable levels. We need to do some things that will be beneficial to the future of the plan. There will continue to be no changes to core benefits, with the same formula continuing based on age . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, each time this government overrides Albertans' rights through legislation, it loses a whole schwaack of support. Bills 19, 36, and 50: whoosh, there goes the right wing. Bills 45 and 46: boom, there goes the left wing. Now pension bills 9 and 10: there goes the landing gear. My question is to the Finance minister. How will your government ever make a safe landing if it keeps overriding people's rights through legislation?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member from the NDP continues to not realize is that we're also responsible for taxpayers' rights. We have to make sure that these plans are fair and equitable for our employees, that they are sustainable into the future. The hon. member is exactly right. This isn't our money, but we are the trustee of these plans. It's important that we make sure that they're sustainable so that employees today, past, and future have those pensions when they need them.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wonder why the Finance minister sees the pensions of its own employees and other public employees as the source of the financial problems of this government instead of the very low taxes, instead of all of the waste, instead of all of the fabulous perks and severances and so on for its management employees. Why are you going after people's pensions to save money?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be farther from the truth. Indeed, this is about maintaining a benefit for employees and fairness to the taxpayers, who contribute roughly half of what this is. The hon. member is trying to somehow connect the pensions to our financial situation. The financial situation of this government is very, very strong. We have never said that this was about saving money. We have always said that this is about saving the defined benefit pension plan for our employees, not going to a DC, which is what the Wildrose has in their preferred budget, and not raising taxes or contribution rates to an unacceptable level, which is what they want.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Let's go on with question 6. No lengthy preambles hereinafter, please. They're not allowed.
Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Electricity Generation from Renewable Sources

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my time with the Ministry of Energy I learned lots about electricity and also about the potential of renewable energy. I'd like to ask this question of the Minister of Energy. How will your ministry create the conditions for the greening of our electricity grid while at the same time not compromising the market-based electricity system that we have here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question. It's a great question. Certainly, in our energy-only market system, that is working very well for Albertans as well, we've seen that more than 45 per cent of the province's electricity generation capacity comes from alternative and renewable energy sources. We have been working and meeting with the stakeholders to make sure that they, too, can give us their input into this because, first and foremost, it's important to hear from those stakeholders how they see that we can continue to green the grid.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you. We need to know more about incentives, but I'd like to talk a little bit more about cogeneration facilities. They provide one-third of our electricity here in Alberta. I'm wondering how the alternative and renewable strategy will allow us to reach the full potential of cogeneration facilities for the benefit of consumers.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I started saying in the last answer, we had the opportunity to bring stakeholders together this week in Calgary and to talk about not just cogeneration but to talk with wind, to talk with solar, to talk with geothermal, all of those and to hear their ideas. Certainly, it's the first time that that whole group collectively has been brought into the room to really talk about that and hear ideas from each other. That's what we're doing right now. Under an energy-only market how do we make sure that we add more alternatives and renewables to the system? We're hearing great ideas from them.

2:10

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Given that the minister is reaching out to industry stakeholders, one of the questions I have from my constituents is: when are they going to be seeking public input, particularly consumer input, into this framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now I'm listening to stakeholders from the environmental groups, from the industry groups, from the wind, the solar, the geothermal, all of those groups to hear some ideas from them first. After that, we'll go out and talk to Albertans. But, first, what's important is those with the ideas, those that will do the investment in renewables from all sides, being able to hear from them: what kind of ideas do they have? When we do that and we come with a draft framework, we can actually talk about the things that they have told us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary Fish-Creek, followed by Red Deer-North.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we've asked dozens of questions about the financial practices of AHS, \$250 million here, a billion dollars there, and every time the answers are the same, that they were approved under the former AHS board and that that board has been fired and that AHS has an audit and financial committee that reviews these contracts. Well, it turns out that the chair of the committee is in a bind. He sat on the former AHS board before he was fired last June, the same board that's apparently to blame in the first place. How can members of the former board be both the cause of the problem and the solution?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what an invention. Whoever said that the former board was the cause of the problem?

In fact, if one looks at the \$1 billion worth of sole-source contracts, that are so nefarious, one will find that \$900 million of that \$1 billion was spent on cataract surgery and long-term care, hiring the services that Albertans need and want so that they can get timely access to service, they can get appropriate long-term care, and they can get the things they need for quality of life. Interestingly enough, those contracts adhere to the policy, a procurement policy that was in place, a procurement policy that the Auditor General reviewed, and a new procurement . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was his Health minister that made the comment last week. You had better read your briefing notes again.

Given that the AHS Audit and Finance Committee has the power to conduct or authorize investigations into any matter within the scope of its responsibilities and the power to retain independent counsel and forensic accountants to assist in the investigation, will the Premier issue a ministerial directive ordering the committee to investigate the consulting and sole-source contracts awarded by AHS?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member had been paying attention, she would know that there's been a sequence of activities by the Auditor General over the years looking exactly at the Alberta Health Services sole-source contract process, making recommendations with respect to that, doing a sampling, as I mentioned in the House previously, with respect to it, finding in fact that the contracts were being awarded in accordance with the policy, and continuing to make recommendations with respect to how they should proceed. In fact, as a result, I presume, of much of that work, there's been a new policy put in place, effective April 1, by the AHS executive called the procurement business practices policy and noncompetitive procurement procedure.

The Speaker: Thank you. Time is up. I'm sorry.
Let's go on.

Mrs. Forsyth: Premier, I had a lot of hopes on you, but gee willikers.

Given that as a result of all efforts to expose the waste and questionable contracting practice at AHS, a spokesperson from AHS is now considering posting all contracts online to show greater accountability to taxpayers, will the Premier tell AHS to post those before we leave this session?

Mr. Hancock: Gee willikers. Golly. I'm almost speechless at that.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta Health Services is providing health services to Albertans on a daily basis. Can we do a better job? Absolutely. We strive every day to do a better job for Albertans. But are we providing through Alberta Health Services some of the best health services in the country? Absolutely. And on so many measures it is true. Albertans are well served.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Seniors' Lodges

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there are a number of seniors' lodges in Alberta, some that are owned by the government and some that are owned by foundations, that need upgrades, renovations, and modernizations. Many are very old, like Autumn Glen Lodge in Innisfail, that is over 50 years old. It has a needs assessment that makes it clear that it has surpassed its best-before date. Seniors' lodges are one of very few programs that provide affordable and supportive housing for seniors who do not require continuing care. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what grants are available for seniors' lodge modernizations and rebuilds?

The Speaker: The hon. Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and answer this question. I just have to thank this member for consistently advocating on behalf of seniors not just in her community but across the province. Thank you so very much.

Mr. Speaker, last spring we allocated \$31 million to the seniors' lodge program, that can be used to retrofit or add fire suppression support in the buildings, and in Budget 2014 we're investing \$289 million in capital over three years to renew seniors' lodges and social housing across the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: will the government of Alberta continue to support seniors' lodges, or is its focus now on continuing care facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. acting minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. The Alberta government has dedicated over \$150 million towards seniors' housing across the province, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the \$31 million that we talked about last year, we have \$88 million that went towards nine lodge redevelopment projects in '12-13, and we included \$40 million for rural lodges. We're evaluating all lodges right now and determining priorities. There will be another \$40 million this year dedicated to rural lodge redevelopment.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: is there a capital financing program available for affordable housing that can be used for seniors' lodges as they're one of the oldest forms of affordable housing?

The Speaker: The hon. acting minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this government is looking at every possible way that we can support our seniors, our seniors' housing, and our housing agencies. That's why recently we approved that Alberta Social Housing

Corporation now has the authority to lend money to eligible housing providers for various projects that maintain or add Alberta housing supplies. This is a great change. This lending policy will ensure that housing providers and municipalities have the financial support they need to forward the lodge projects that are so necessary in their communities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PDD Supports Intensity Scale Assessments

Mrs. Towle: Service providers and families have long said that the supports intensity scale interview is humiliating. Here are some of the questions that are asked of clients in the SIS interview. What assistance would you need to have a romantic relationship up to and including an intimate one like other regular people your age? If you were a regular 28-year-old woman who wanted to take a course, would you need help? Did you ever expose yourself inappropriately? Do you steal? Can the associate minister explain why he is demeaning clients with developmental disabilities by asking them to compare themselves to regular people?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on delivering the highest quality of service to Albertans, who can lead fulfilling lives in their communities. I answered this question yesterday. SIS is a tool which is used to make baseline assessments right across the province so we can deliver consistent services regardless of where you live in the province: east, west, north, south. That's what the SIS tool is all about.

Mrs. Towle: "Regular people" is offensive and demeaning. Given that the person with developmental disabilities is often unable to answer or comprehend the questions so someone is their proxy and given that nonverbal individuals are subjected to these exact same questions and their proxy answers for them, how does the associate minister believe that the supports intensity scale assessment is even remotely accurate?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, SIS is one of the tools which is used to make the assessment to meet the needs of the individual. To meet the needs of an individual, we use their existing support systems in place, their geographical locations. It's about their needs, their goals. That's what this tool is all about. When other people are answering the question or assisting the individuals, that's what they're assisting them with: their guardians, their loved ones helping them to attain the goals that they're looking for.

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, this minister is supposed to be an advocate. Given that yesterday the associate minister said that this is only one of the tools, as he has said today – and, clearly, based on this line of questioning, it is so offensive and demeaning to these clients – can the associate minister explain what other tools the PDD ministry is using to assess needs for funding?

2:20

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, Mr. Speaker, I answered this question in my previous answer. When we're talking about the funding, we're looking at the needs of the individual. Their geographical location plays a significant role. Their needs, their aspirations, their goals play a significant role. Of course, included in all of this is taking all of the services which are required to meet the needs of that individual.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

LGBTQ Rights

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a fair comment that our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered Albertans have not always seen this government as being progressive when it comes to advocating for those rights. I guess one small step of progress was taken today in that nine years after the federal government changed the marriage act to recognize that, essentially, you're allowed to marry in this country whoever you love, this government, I guess, today made some changes to their Marriage Act. I'd like to ask the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety why this debate happened today and why she thought . . .

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Both he and I share an interest in issues around the LGBT community, and I'm proud to say that this is the first time the minister has had LGBTQ issues in their portfolio. So I'm tremendously proud of that and all of the issues that we are able to move forward on and I'm able to move forward on in that capacity. My door is always open when the member has concerns about that community, and I'm happy to answer any questions about that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I take the minister's comments at face value, but do you think she's going to have the same success when she's talking about LGBTQ rights in terms of changes to Bill 44 on our human rights, especially section 11.1, which many people in the LGBTQ community found a slap in the face?

Ms Jansen: Once again, I thank the member for that question. As I said before, my door is always open to discuss issues that make the LGBT community feel accepted and part of an inclusive Alberta. Thank you for that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, a wise woman once said that GSAs are grounded in issues of equal access and accommodation which are firmly established and protected in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. To the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety: do you think you'll be able to talk to your colleagues on that side of the House about the importance of GSAs and bring forward legislation in the upcoming fall session to make these mandatory in all schools in Alberta where kids want them?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again I thank the member. As he knows, I spoke very passionately about my acceptance of these issues and the passion I felt for Motion 503. I admire him for bringing it up. I still believe that it is important, and I will always have those discussions with anyone who wants to have them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Fire Safety in Seniors' Facilities

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This January a Quebec seniors' home caught fire with very tragic consequences. Thirty-two residents died in the blaze. Those that perished lived in an

older section of the home built before regulations required the installation of sprinklers. Without immediate action, we run a risk of a similar tragedy happening here in this province. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how many Alberta seniors are at risk, living in facilities without sprinklers, and what are you going to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question, and I'd like to thank the member for asking it. We care very deeply about our seniors and the protection of our seniors. As you know, the rules changed in 1990, and sprinklers were required in all seniors' facilities, and we have complied with that. We've also talked earlier in a question today about money we've put into our budget to allow housing authorities to upgrade their facilities because any facility – many of ours were built before 1990, and any of those will not have sprinklers. So we're working with them to renovate and make sure that happens.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that in the budget estimates this Minister of Municipal Affairs admitted that “an incredible number” of Alberta's seniors' facilities don't have sprinklers, not safe, and given that in Edmonton the fire chief estimated that at least one-third of seniors' care homes are unsprinklered, unsafe as well, will this minister, then, please make public the reports of many other fire chiefs and health professionals that have raised concerns about fire safety in seniors' facilities, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with our fire services across the province. They're an important advocate. Fire suppression is not just about sprinklers – it is one part of it – but it's about manning within the facilities, and we're looking at that. We're looking at other types of fire suppression and protection of our vulnerable seniors. What we're going to do is to continue to put a holistic approach together of how we can both protect seniors in existing facilities and upgrade facilities to take care of some of the concerns we have around our older facilities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that other provinces are committing funds directly to fire safety in seniors' care facilities and given that staffing in seniors' facilities is often inadequate to evacuate residents in a safe and timely manner, this time to the Associate Minister of Seniors: when will your government commit to an action plan for fire safety in seniors' facilities, including sprinklers and adequate staffing?

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Municipal Affairs has said, there are evacuation plans for all of these facilities that are done not just in consultation but with the oversight of the local fire departments. For the facilities that were built before 1990 our government has recently invested \$31 million for the repair and retrofit of some of the seniors' facilities, that includes sprinklers, and there is still some funding available for that. We encourage any housing management bodies that haven't done that to apply.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Strathcona Community Hospital

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the need for beds far exceeds supply at almost every Edmonton area hospital, so I was shocked to learn that this PC government was cancelling the beds and operating rooms it promised in Sherwood Park for the long-awaited Strathcona community hospital. This \$130 million health clinic is set to open next month, but it has no beds and zero operating rooms. To the Minister of Infrastructure: how can you call this glorified walk-in clinic a hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're proud of opening that facility in the near future. I can tell you that there are a lot of people in Sherwood Park actually looking forward to it. They're looking forward to improved and new places to go and get health care. We think that it's going to be a positive addition. Frankly, I would say to the hon. member that I think if he checks, he may find more happy people than unhappy people, and he should probably spend some time with them.

Mr. Barnes: Residents just want to see the hospital they were promised, Minister.

Given that this PC government broke its promise to renovate the Misericordia hospital, which is now in dire need of repairs, does the government not see the value in keeping their promise and finishing phase 2 in Sherwood Park to relieve some of the pressure in Edmonton?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows, because it's been said in the House and he was here – I'm making the assumption that he was listening – that we are actually in the midst of a \$19.2 million renovation to the Misericordia in co-operation with the folks in Health. This is part of a bigger program. In Alberta, of course, we've got a growing population, we've got a great economy, and because of that we are always trying to balance dollars between new facilities and looking after the old ones. It's a struggle that will never end. We're doing this for the benefit of Albertans, and we intend to continue.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park promised this hospital to his constituents and then his government delayed the project several times with a full guarantee that the entire project would eventually go ahead, does the minister not agree that a full, public, prioritized infrastructure list would be a better way to build Alberta and protect Albertans from vote-seeking MLAs over this minister's current bait-and-switch list?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting. The last time I checked, the opposition's list doesn't list any projects that they would build. Why? Because they don't want to tell Albertans which schools they wouldn't build, they don't want to tell Albertans which hospitals they would not build, they don't want to tell Albertans which roads they would not build. Our government, on the other hand, has a list of all the projects we will build on our website, which all Albertans and even the hon. member, if he could get someone to find it for him, may look at.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

2:30 Municipal Government Act Review

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The review of the Municipal Government Act has been on the books for years, but there appears to have been little progress to date. Municipal leaders in my constituency of Banff-Cochrane are confused and have expressed concern regarding the process and timelines for the MGA review. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that the current public consultations on the MGA are a good start but are far from adequate on such an important piece of legislation, can the minister outline the complete process going forward and the realistic time frames to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank this member for the question. I know his involvement in municipal government has really created an interest in this area. The Municipal Government Act really defines the relationship between the province and our municipalities, which are one of our most important partners. It's critically important that we get this document right because it will help frame how municipalities can deal with the issues they face around incredible growth over the next number of years. We're in 11 communities right now holding hearings, listening to people, but at the end of the day we're going to do it right.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that many of our property assessment processes are decades old and that when the act was rewritten the last time, there was an incomplete review of assessment, can the minister confirm that the MGA review this time will include a thorough and complete evaluation of property assessment?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. I can assure this member that that is one of the most important parts of the review that we're doing right now. As I've sat in on some of the meetings, I've heard concerns and issues around assessment. In fact, in the newspaper today in Medicine Hat there were concerns brought forward by a nonresidential around assessment in those areas, so we know it is an important issue across the province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The 1995 MGA was groundbreaking in that it gave municipalities natural person powers. However, times have changed, and it is now time to move on to the next level. Can the minister ensure that the review will include consideration of a new relationship between municipalities and government?

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you again for that question. Really, the review: that's what it's all about, defining that relationship and looking at a new relationship for the next 20 or 30 years, as we face incredible growth, as we are the engine of the economy here in Canada. What does the relationship have to be to make sure that municipalities have the tools to grow, to be sustainable so that we can work with them to provide that support? Mr. Speaker, absolutely, we're going to work with them to define what that new relationship with municipalities will be like.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Bow.

ALERT Program Funding

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta law enforcement response teams, or ALERT, are busy in the city of Brooks and across the province in efforts to co-operate and share information, which helps to bring cases against criminals across all boundaries of Alberta. In our community ALERT has been responsible for a serious reduction in crime through their targeted attack on drug trafficking rings. Just this January ALERT alongside the Brooks RCMP took over \$50,000 worth of drugs off the street. To the Associate Minister of Public Safety: why is this ministry cutting funding to a made-in-Alberta solution to an ever-evolving gang and organized crime problem?

Mr. Olson: Obviously, I'm not in a position to provide a detailed answer to this question, but I will say, Mr. Speaker, that we are proud of our record when it comes to crime reduction. This is a great example of a success, as the member points out, and we will continue to support those kinds of programs. In terms of the details of this question I can't answer this for him right now. I can take it under advisement.

Mr. Hale: Thank you for your support, but given that the Minister of Justice has instructed the joint chiefs and ALERT's management team to find 20 per cent in the budget to cut and given that this minister has now hired a consultant to produce an efficiency study, can the Associate Minister of Public Safety tell us why they are looking into cutting a program which promotes seamless collaboration between all law enforcement agencies and the RCMP?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that our law enforcement on the front line are very valuable to Albertans. We've made a commitment in this province to make sure that we protect Albertans but at the same time find efficiencies. I'd be happy to sit down with this member and go through in a detailed way exactly what's happening on this particular file. It's an important one. We need to make sure that Albertans are safe. We'll continue to do that. That's what our government is here to do. We're going to do it with Albertans, for Albertans, and by Albertans. I can tell you that our front-line staff are capable. We'll take any recommendation, and I'll take the recommendations of this hon. member.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Thank you. I would urge the associate minister to listen to the front-line staff. That's who's calling me.

Given that Alberta law enforcement response teams have seized more than \$500 million worth of drugs from Alberta streets since being formed in the province in 2006 to tackle organized crime, will the associate minister commit today that no funding will be cut from ALERT, which would ultimately affect the boots on the ground and put Albertans' safety at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, what I can tell you is that our front-line staff are very valuable, and they'll continue to be. Also, there are administrative people within the Ministry of

Justice and in my department that look at every aspect of how we protect Albertans. It's about finding efficiencies. It's finding new ways to do things. We're building a province where a hundred thousand people are coming here every year. This government is committed to being nimble and making sure that our communities are safe. I'll be happy to sit down with this member and talk to the front-line staff he's talking about.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my neighbourhood of Bowness a number of houses that were flooded are now dealing with foundation damage that has caused irreparable harm to the house itself. In one case an outer wall bulged outward four feet from true. These houses are destroyed, with electrical, plumbing, and structural damage so severe it's economically unfeasible to repair; yet in each case the DRP offered only the cost of repairing the foundation. Given the government's commitment to help those who were impacted by the flood, can the minister confirm that cases such as these will receive a thorough . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an incredible event that has caused families and homes to suffer like this. We would hope that as many as possible of these files can be solved right at the front end and that we can deal with these families as quickly as possible. We do know that there will be an appeal process that is going to happen. The first line of appeal is that the person can appeal to the managing director of AEMA. They have support to look at that and get advice. If that doesn't work, those folks can then appeal to me as well, and I can have a look at that file and try to make sure they're . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Given the widespread concern over how the DRP rushed the closure of people's files over the last month of the program, can the minister assure the House that these files will be reviewed to ensure they were properly handled and not rushed to closure?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard from people across the devastated areas that they wanted us to move as quickly as possible on these files, so we have put many more people to work. We have worked very hard, weekends and evenings, to ensure that we can put these files through as quickly as possible. We have done a very good job of that, but we do know that just over 300 of the files have been appealed to date. We're working very quickly through that process, and we're going to try to ensure that every one of those gets fair treatment and that each of those files is considered fairly and accurately.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My final question is to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister assure me that the application from residents on Bow

Crescent to stabilize the bank will be dealt with this week as there is only a three-week window for the construction period this year before the coming high-water season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that my department met with the residents' group that the member is referring to, and we agreed to fund the cost of an engineer on a pilot basis to assess the damage and design an acceptable erosion protection system for these properties. However, the construction and maintenance costs for mitigation projects on private land are the responsibility of the landowner, and provincial flood mitigation funding programs are only available in our municipalities. I can say to this member that I have asked our department to look at that, and I'll get an answer back to her this week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Stony Plain.

2:40 Transportation Infrastructure Priorities

Mr. Stier: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Albertans are very concerned that Alberta Transportation has an enormous infrastructure deficit and no plan. Through a FOIP request we discovered that the 2014 infrastructure deficit as of November 2013 for Alberta Transportation structures is \$520 million. Deferred maintenance, however, which is the overall accumulated infrastructure deficit that was to be addressed in previous years, is now apparently at a whopping \$1.4 billion. Minister, what is the plan for Alberta Transportation to address this enormous infrastructure deficit this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be the first to agree that we need to spend more money on transportation in this province. But as we all know, we had to face some realities here a couple of years ago, and there was \$900 million cut out of the Transportation budget. So we're living within our means.

I was really happy to see, Mr. Speaker, that in this budget I had an extra \$258 million added to the budget, bringing it to \$758 million, to help with the rehabilitation of 2,500 kilometres of roads.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, one year ago the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View raised the issue of highway 8, which runs east from Calgary to the junction of highway 22 and the Trans-Canada, highway 1. It has had multiple fatalities in the last few years, climbing traffic counts, increased trucking, and has residents of Calgary demanding that Alberta Transportation address this very large safety issue. It is known that designs for twinning have already been completed. That being the case, why is this very vital link to the west of the city not on the '14-17 construction list, please?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very important piece of highway. We have designed the twinning, but as I said, we have to live within our means. We only have so many dollars. As Minister of Transportation it's my department's job to balance all the requests we have with the money we have. Highway 8 is part of the ring road in Calgary, and part of that project will twin part of highway 8 and the bridges. So until we've done the ring road, we can't continue with the twinning.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. Well, one last question, then. With the summer driving season now fast approaching, the mayors and reeves of southern Alberta have once again raised their concerns regarding highway 3, especially from Fort Macleod to the Crownsnest Pass, where enormous traffic congestion of highway transports and recreational traffic plague the efficiency caused by the bottleneck constrictions in that region. When will the minister fulfill the obligation made when the Premier confirmed in 2007 that it was to be constructed, please?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, every MLA and every municipality I meet with have priorities, including this one, and we have lots of them from all over the province. There's more to this province than Edmonton and Calgary and the ring roads and highway 63. We have to spend money all over rural Alberta. We'll try and balance the dollars with the projects we have. I hope this opposition takes note of how hard it is when we cut \$900 million out of the budget. They're recommending to cut \$5 billion out of the budget.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Two reminders. One, you have 35 seconds for a question; you have 35 seconds for an answer. I don't have any joy particularly when I have to stand up and cut someone off. So please review that. Those of you who have practised questions, please practise them with a second-hand, not a, more or less, guessing hand.

Number two, and perhaps even more importantly, is that one hon. member is celebrating a milestone birthday today, and I know that we will all want to give her our full attention and recognition as she turns a magic age. Please join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for reaching a certain 50 club. Thank you.

Thirty seconds from now I'll ask the Clerk to announce the next order of business.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us continue, then, with Members' Statements, beginning with Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Cancer Awareness

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to commemorate Daffodil Month, the Canadian Cancer Society's annual fundraising initiative that focuses on the fight against cancer. Every day 500 Canadians are told that they have cancer. Estimates show that 2 out of every 5 Canadians are expected to develop the disease during their lifetime, with an estimated 1 out of 4 dying from it.

In 2012, an estimated 16,000 Albertans were diagnosed with cancer, and as current projections suggest, by 2030 this is expected to rise to an astonishing 24,000 Albertans annually. This is a 60 per cent increase compared to today's numbers. We all must do what we can to prevent this rise. Our government implemented Changing Our Future, a cancer prevention strategy that addresses this projected increase. Last session we passed Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012, with the intent of eradicating tobacco use amongst our youth.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we don daffodil pins, a symbol of our strength and courage, in order to show our support for those currently battling cancer, for those that have won the fight, and those who have lost. Their struggles will never be forgotten. If you haven't yet, I urge you to show your support and purchase a pin, make a donation, or volunteer time to a local event. Together we can all make a difference in combating this illness and find a cure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by St. Albert.

PDD Supports Intensity Scale Assessments

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The supports intensity scale, or SIS, is used to determine individual support needs. Last year we heard the previous minister of PDD explain again and again how effective this tool was. The new minister has indicated that while SIS is very important to how the government identifies the needs of vulnerable Albertans, it is just one of the many tools they use to do so.

Mr. Speaker, this is not what we hear from the front-line workers and the families of vulnerable Albertans who try to work within this broken system. These families have indicated that the system relies far too heavily on the supports intensity scale and that the questions asked are humiliating and often hard for the PDD clients to understand. Let me give you an example. If you were to participate in postsecondary education like regular people, would you need help to do so? Are you sexually active? Are you safe when sexually active? Do you need help to be sexually active? Do you ever sexually assault others? What assistance would you need to have a romantic relationship, up to and including an intimate one, like other regular people your age?

Imagine if the assistance given to your loved one relied on how you answered those questions. Imagine PDD clients knowing their livelihood is at stake when they're asked those questions. Imagine front-line workers, who see the holes in the system every single day, having to ask a person with developmental disabilities about their sex life and then attempt to gauge what assistance they should receive for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, also imagine what it is like to be told that the answers to those questions should be given in the context of a regular person. That is so offensive and out of line. I am shocked that anyone in this PC government or any reasonable person, for that matter, would find that language acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of SIS assessment appeals going on right now. These subject the clients and families to another round of demeaning questions by a different person. Please fix this broken system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring attention to an issue that has been brought to my attention by St. Albert constituent Dr. Shawna Rodnunsky. Dr. Rodnunsky is an exceptional advocate for an illness that affects many Albertans, chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS.

Individuals who suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome are often debilitated and unable to do normal daily activities. This illness is characterized by symptoms such as profound fatigue, muscle pain, memory loss, poor concentration, and depression. Despite

vigorous research, we have not been able to identify the exact cause of CFS, and there are no direct tests to diagnose CFS.

2:50

While there is no single cause for this disease, many factors are said to be possible triggers for CFS. They include infections, immune system dysfunction, hypotension, nutritional deficiencies, and stress. Because of CFS's complex nature and our current insufficient medical understanding of this illness, many Albertans affected by it are not able to receive the proper care they need through Alberta Health Services. To date one of the only resources available to assist CFS patients is the Calgary Fatigue Centre, which is mainly staffed by naturopathic doctors. While holistic options to treat CFS can be helpful, conventional medical testing, prescribed medication, and treatments through AHS still play a major and irreplaceable role in successful CFS treatments.

However, because of high demand the Calgary Fatigue Centre alone cannot meet the medical needs of all CFS patients province-wide. Going to Calgary on a regular basis for CFS appointments is not a viable option for those who live outside of that city. It's crucial for AHS to create an organized system to assist those diagnosed with CFS and make sure their access to care is effective and timely.

Additionally, we must enhance the focus of CFS treatments in Alberta, and we must ensure that health care providers are well informed and trained to recognize and diagnose this illness. It's my sincere wish that AHS will expand its support . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'm sorry to interrupt, but the time has elapsed, as you know.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Calder and Edmonton-Centre. Did you have a tabling, Little Bow?

Mr. Donovan: No. I tabled it yesterday.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Let's take that one off, then, and move on to Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today. The first one is copies of a petition with 160 signatures from the Heritage Senior Stop-in Centre. The petition strongly opposes "any changes in the Pharmacare/Alberta Health Care program which will financially affect the seniors" here in the province.

The second tabling I have is 50 of more than 4,000 postcards our office has received asking the PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education here in Alberta. That's by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of petitions signed by individuals from across Alberta. Given that the pensions of front-line workers must be fair and provide decent retirement income and that legislated, non-negotiated changes to LAPP and PSPP are unfair and will gut retirement, they are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will ensure any changes to the LAPP or the PSPP are the result of negotiations between Government and affected employees." You know what? I

didn't do an exact count, but we're in the thousands. Thank you very much for that first tabling.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is hot off the press. It's the most recent issue of *Municipal Connection*, which is produced by Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. In the second paragraph they note: "AUMA's submission to [the President of Treasury Board and Finance minister] highlighted our member concerns that pension reform could cause issues with the attraction and retention of qualified staff in the municipal sector." I'll tell you that if we lose too many of those, it's going to be a problem.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're now at points of order, and I believe we have one, which was raised at around 1:58 p.m. I believe, if memory serves, it was the hon. Member for Airdrie rising on a point of order. Yes, it was.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically with regard to making allegations against another member of this House as well as imputing false or unavowed motives to another member or using abusive, insulting language to another member. I don't have the Blues in front of me, but the gist of what the Premier said – and he made it quite clear; he took a large part of his answer to make this accusation. He said that the hon. Official Opposition leader had somehow broken the law by refusing to obey an evacuation order. I will take you through (a) why that is completely false and (b) why that should be withdrawn by the hon. Premier. The hon. Premier should know better in this regard.

As you know, there was some terrible flooding in High River. The Member for Highwood, the Official Opposition leader, is the MLA for that area. Of course, immediately upon the flooding there was chaos. She was separated from her husband for a long period of time as she had been sand-bagging at a hospital during the initial moments of the flood and then had to be rescued thereafter. Then she was involved for two days after that with pet rescue, when they were able to rescue dozens of pets. Sadly, they had to deal with a lot of dead pets as well and take care of that issue. She worked basically around the clock for those two days.

Her husband at that time was helping her pick up residents around the town who were still in their homes and trying to get them to safer ground. As part of that they also offered their house, which was one of the few houses that did not get flooded, as temporary shelter for those displaced individuals.

After about three days, on June 24, the mayor then asked all residents, including the Official Opposition leader, to leave because they were going to begin to enforce the evacuation order for safety reasons, and they wanted everybody out. She immediately left and did not return until she was permitted to, after July 3.

I don't even know what to say about the Premier stating that the hon. member had done something wrong in this regard. Clearly, she followed the orders of police and the mayor of the town, who had asked for her help up until that point, and she had freely given it. As soon as she was asked to leave, she left. She did absolutely nothing wrong and certainly did not break the law as has been stated.

I think it's pretty clear that when you say someone has broken a law, that's a problem. We couldn't say that about another member in this House. We certainly have talked about the need to get answers regarding the issue of the Jasper Park Lodge and so forth, with regard to: please give us information, or we'll have to turn this over to the proper authorities. It's one thing to do that; it's quite another to say that someone has broken the law. Not only have they not broken the law, but it's an allegation that should not have been thrown at this hon. member, especially since she was actually one of many heroes of the flood during that time.

I would ask that the Premier withdraw those comments immediately. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make some comments regarding this matter. First of all, I would state the obvious, that neither the member opposite, who just spoke, nor me nor you, apparently, have the benefit of the Blues. I think it's very important to know exactly the words that were spoken.

That is not my recollection. I did not hear a direct allegation. I did hear a mention of something that has been mentioned numerous times coming from the other side in the context of questioning certain members of this side of the House, in fact repeated questions about criminal activity.

I think one needs to consider the context in which this exchange took place. When questions are being raised about potential criminal activity of one member of the House, if another member of the House in response raises a question without even a direct allegation, then I think that has to be taken into account. In fact, sir, just very recently I think you mentioned that when ruling on another point of order, where you have said that one needs to consider the context. It can't be one way on one side and another way on the other side of the House. Given that and given the fact that, at least in my recollection, there was not any direct allegation – the Premier did not say that the Member for Highwood broke the law. I certainly stand to be corrected if the Blues prove me wrong on that, but that is not my recollection of what the Premier said.

With that, I would say that there is no point of order here, sir.

3:00

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much. I was moved by the words of the minister of agriculture to contribute to this discussion. I don't see how past comments by one side to the other side have anything to do with what happened today. Points of order are always ruled on for exactly who said what to whom today, not yesterday or the day before, unless, of course, there's a ruling by the Speaker, and then we would all be obeying it and there wouldn't be a point of order.

Unlike the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I did hear the Premier accuse the Leader of the Official Opposition or make a statement that was casting aspersions upon her to the point that it was causing extra work for police services to have to evacuate her, that she had refused to go. That's just not the case. Especially around that particular incident that's just not necessary. I was really disappointed in the words of the Premier, speaking like that about someone that worked so hard in a disaster. I hope that the minister of agriculture is able to withdraw a wrong and a particularly nasty allegation and that we'll deal with the context that is before us today and with the words that were spoken by the minister to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

You know, these are the leaders, Mr. Speaker. If they can't manage to raise the tone and dignity, there is no hope for the rest for us. In particular, I set a high standard for the Premier as he was Government House Leader for so long and has sat in this Chamber as long as I have. Really, he should rise above that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, let me address this. I don't have the complete set of Blues, but I think I have enough here to come to a verdict as it were. At approximately 1:56 this afternoon the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition rose and said, among other things, the following:

If this Premier knows something untoward has happened, he owes it to Albertans to tell them. Not telling them is tantamount to covering it up. If this Premier refuses to answer, we will have no choice but to ask the RCMP to investigate whether taxpayer dollars were used to pay for a Jasper resort vacation for the former Premier. This Premier can clear the air right now. Did the former Premier actually have any legitimate business to justify being in Jasper at taxpayers' expense that weekend?

The Premier, according to the Blues, said the following in response:

Mr. Speaker, I have already advised the House that I have no information with respect to that, and I'm not about to scurry and get information with respect to that. The Auditor General is looking into the travel policy and the expense policy and has access to all the information and will report in due course. What I do know of that weekend is that there was somebody who was getting in the way of the law, and that was that hon. member, who refused to be evacuated from High River at a very serious time, setting a very bad example for her constituents.

Now, I know you're all aware of what *Beauchesne's* and HOC say, but I want to read the comments to you in any event because we've all been in this Chamber for almost two years at least, some of us much longer. We know what the cut and thrust of debate is all about. We also know that sometimes you have to accept two different versions of the same situation. But I can say this. I hope we can rise higher than some of the innuendo, frankly, that has come from both sides of the House. Let's be fair, applaud each other, and hang your heads where you want. It happens from one side to the other, from the other side to the other, and there's just so much of it that goes on that I'm surprised, frankly, we don't have a point of order on almost every question. You know what I'm talking about.

When we get into issues that are matters of inference or innuendo or insinuation or imputation of false motives or allegations – all of the "I" words you can think of and all of the "A" words you can think of – attributing aspersions, all of those things, you know that we're treading on very thin ice with each other. You know that somebody is going to lose their temper, and you know what it's going to result in.

Now, I wasn't personally there. I don't know what happened. I take the Member for Airdrie at his word when he says that his leader was there to do some sand-bagging and rescuing herself, helping out with pets, picking up residents, offering her home as a temporary shelter, and so on. I take him at his word because that's what we do here. By the same token, I take the hon. Premier and the hon. minister of agriculture at their word when they say that they didn't impute any false or unavowed motives there.

Now, we could interpret this in different ways perhaps, but I know what this is all aimed at. Generally speaking, in this House it's aimed at getting under each other's skin a little bit, right? But you have to be able to take as good as you give and vice versa, and I have seen that happen here time and time again. Asking the

same question, hoping to get a different answer is one tactic. I understand that, too.

I'm going to accept this as two different versions of the same event, and I'm going to rely on *Beauchesne's* 494, which I will remind you of briefly. It'll take 35 seconds. *Beauchesne's* 494 says the following:

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible.

"Intentional" is a key word here.

On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

One final sentence, perhaps two, coming out of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009. On page 510, at the top of the page, it reads as follows:

In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

That's where I'm going to rule on this one.

But I want to caution both sides, government members, particularly Executive Council, and opposition members as well, that you cannot do indirectly what you're not allowed to do directly, and I would ask you to please elevate the tone and timbre of the debate in this House. We have a long weekend coming up. Some of us will be celebrating Easter. Some of us will be celebrating some time off with our families, being from different faiths. Let's take this time to reflect on our overall demeanour in this House. Hopefully, we can elevate the debate to a higher level when Tuesday rolls around.

In the meantime let's go on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 8

Appropriation Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014.

The Appropriation Act, 2014, will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2014-15 fiscal year. The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail by the 2014-15 government and Legislative Assembly estimates, tabled on March 6, 2014. These estimates were subsequently debated in Committee of Supply and the legislative policy committees.

Mr. Speaker, as I said on budget day, the actions we took in the previous budget were tough but necessary. We needed to bend the curve on annual spending increases, and we did that. Budget 2014 keeps Alberta on a disciplined fiscal path with a modest 3.7 per cent increase in our operational spending. An increase, yes, but well below the 5 per cent increase you would see under a population plus inflation scenario. At the same time our revenue outlook has improved due to higher tax revenues, higher energy prices, strong investment returns, and a lower dollar. This

improved revenue picture combined with our focused effort to contain spending has set the stage for our government to do something this spring that it has not been able to do in six years: present a fully balanced budget.

3:10

The real story of Budget 2014 is what we are doing for Albertans. We're investing in communities and families, we're living within our means, and we're opening new markets to grow our economy. With Budget 2014 government is focused on working hard every day to create a better quality of life for all Albertans. It is the next step in the building Alberta plan, a forward-looking action plan sharply focused on addressing the needs of Albertans today while meeting the challenge of rapid population growth head-on without raising taxes, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, Alberta's population has reached the 4 million mark, surpassed it, and is expected to reach 5 million within the next decade. There are lots of positives to that. More people living and working here means jobs get filled, the economy grows, and government revenues will increase. But the influx of new Albertans also increases the demand for infrastructure, programs, and services. Budget 2014 responds to these growth pressures with priority-driven infrastructure spending.

I know the hon. members opposite were talking about infrastructure deficits, Mr. Speaker. They're as bad as cash deficits. In order to compensate for that, we're building 155 school projects, seven postsecondary projects, 24 health facility projects, 258 kilometres of new and twinned roads, 2,500 kilometres of rehabilitated highways, and there's more than \$5 billion to support municipal infrastructure. There is also a \$1 billion increase in core program spending in areas that Albertans have told us are a priority for them like health care, K to 12 education, postsecondary education, and human services.

As we welcome the next million Albertans, our future does look bright. We're outperforming Canada and the United States, and we are expected to lead the provinces in 2014 in economic growth and employment. Our unemployment is among the lowest in Canada. In spite of our blessings, though, we must remain prudent and flexible. Factors beyond our control can dramatically affect our financial situation; for example, the 2008 meltdown, energy price volatility, and, of course, natural disasters such as the June 2013 floods.

We're preparing for the unexpected, growing the contingency account to \$5 billion this year. We're also saving for the future, setting aside money in good and challenging times with a legislated savings plan that will see our savings grow to \$26 billion in 2017. We're leveraging a portion of Alberta's growing savings to encourage innovation, support labour force development, and position Alberta for future transformational opportunities with the creation of a social innovation endowment, an agriculture and food innovation endowment, heritage trade scholarships, and the Alberta future fund.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, Alberta is well positioned to move ahead. We have a growing economy and a balance sheet that is the envy of most jurisdictions in North America. Those strong fundamentals are why Alberta has a triple-A credit rating, that allows us to borrow at the lowest rates available. With interest rates at near 50-year lows, there has never been a better time to borrow, and that's what we intend to do. The reason is simple: we must keep building Alberta. If we don't borrow to build now, we risk falling even further behind on that infrastructure deficit that was mentioned by the Wildrose member, burdening the next

generation with years of catch-up on infrastructure. When construction costs and interest rates are higher, it will be that much more expensive for us to build.

Budget 2014 calls for \$19 billion in capital spending over the next three years. One-third of the capital plan will be paid for with cash. The other two-thirds will be financed through direct borrowing or P3s, whichever makes more sense. It's important to note that we have strict rules in place for borrowing. Borrowing costs are limited to 3 per cent of operational revenue. We must protect Alberta's triple-A credit rating. We can only borrow for capital, and there must be a clear debt repayment plan. Government is setting aside money now to repay the bonds when they come due, cash over and above our savings, over and above our operating.

In exchange Albertans get tangible assets like schools, roads, and health facilities when and where they need them the most. The comment has been made that these don't appreciate; however, I would commit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the assessed value of many of the assets that we have on our books is considerably higher than what we have on the books. Alberta is the only province with net assets, currently about \$44 billion in net assets. Under Budget 2014 our net assets are expected to grow to about \$49 billion by 2017.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, in keeping with Budget 2014's prudent revenue forecasting and projections, the amounts in this act demonstrate the government's commitment to managing the growth in the province's operating expense. At the same time Budget 2014 reflects the priorities that Albertans told the government are most important. We're spending smarter and focusing on providing excellent public programs and services while investing in needed infrastructure for today and tomorrow. Budget 2014 is a good budget for all Albertans. I ask all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 8.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's going to be a busy day. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 9, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014.

Alberta's public-sector pension plans are currently on an unsustainable path. While we're not in a crisis situation now – and we've readily said that many times – without adequate changes we could be down the road. Today we're in a situation where thousands of members are enrolled in plans created two generations ago. Today people are living longer, and there is a decreasing ratio of workers to retirees. Today investment return trends are not as high as in the past, yet pension plans depend more and more on volatile investment returns to cover the cost of pensions. So much has changed in four decades, yet our pension plans have not adapted to keep up with the times.

Here we are in 2014, working with a pension system that was designed for another era and another workforce. We are at a critical juncture in time, where these significant challenges threaten to undermine public-sector pension plans. Yet there remain those who claim that Alberta's public-sector pension plans are sustainable as is. Labour groups are trying to convince their members that there's no problem. They expect their members and

employers to increase their contributions year after year, ignoring the fact that they already pay among the highest costs in Canada. They seem to think that crossing our fingers and hoping for high interest rates is the solution for the future. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not.

All signs point to significant problems ahead if we don't act now. Don't just take it from me; experts around the world are warning of the danger ahead. If anyone wants a good understanding of what we and other jurisdictions are facing, they really should read a good book, Mr. Speaker, *The Third Rail*, by Jim Leech and Jacque McNish. Jim Leech is the former CEO of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and had this to say in his book:

Rarely does the pension argument acknowledge the root cause of the retirement meltdown: record numbers of workers are retiring and living longer than anyone anticipated; pension funds have not built in sufficient surpluses to cope with market and demographic stresses; and, employers are increasingly unable or unwilling to shoulder ballooning pension costs.

Experts like Mr. Leech are sounding alarm bells, and jurisdictions across North America are responding. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and P.E.I. have all made drastic changes to their public-sector pension plans recently to make their plans more sustainable. Saskatchewan changed their plans from defined benefit to defined contribution decades ago. In Nova Scotia they've reduced pension benefits and applied some of those changes to the benefits plan members have already earned. In New Brunswick they've moved from a defined benefit plan to a shared-risk target benefit model, where plan members are no longer guaranteed a set amount of benefits in retirement.

Alberta's pension plans are in many ways in better shape than those of our neighbours to the east and across North America; however, the fact remains that our plans are structured the same way as these other plans. Even though we're not yet in the eye of the storm like places such as Detroit or New Brunswick, if we don't change the path we're on, we will be in the same situation down the road. The time has come to tackle the real problem of these plans; that is, the design of the plans.

3:20

What I'm putting forward today is a very moderate and common-sense approach to getting these plans back on track, protecting all benefits that have already been earned while making modest adjustments to the add-on benefits. What you see in this bill is different from what we initially proposed last fall. We consulted with plan members and employers directly and listened to their feedback. The result is the changes we are now proposing, changes that are more modest than what we had proposed earlier while still effective in steering us back to the path of sustainability.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre tabled some letters from the AUMA saying that the pensions were a recruitment and retention tool. We agree, Mr. Speaker. What she failed to also say is that those same employers recommended that we change the early retirement subsidy from the 85-50, not get rid of it but change it, to a 90-60. That's where it came from.

Ms Blakeman: Actually, it doesn't say that.

Mr. Horner: Another letter.

Ms Blakeman: You'll have to table it.

Mr. Horner: I will.

Let me be clear that we are not changing the benefit that pensioners currently receive. Let me repeat: we are not changing the benefit that pensioners currently receive. We are not – and I want to repeat this as well, Mr. Speaker – changing the core benefit formula, and we are not retroactively applying changes to benefits that have already been earned. Now that we all understand what is not up for discussion, let's walk through some of the planned changes.

In our consultation process back in the fall plan members and employers made it very clear that it's important for our pension changes to recognize long service. As a result, as I mentioned earlier, we are modifying but not eliminating early retirement subsidies in the local authorities, public service, and management employees pension plans. Currently LAPP, or the local authorities pension plan, and PSPP, the public service pension plan, have an 85 factor while members of MEPP, the management employees pension plan, have an 80 factor. Under the planned changes all three plans will have a 60-90 factor where plan members can receive an unreduced pension if they work to at least 60 years old and their combined age and years of service equals 90. That will be the new subsidized early retirement.

Individuals will also collect their full pension if they work until the age of 65. We are not increasing the age of retirement, Mr. Speaker. Those who want to retire early can still do so, starting at the age of 55. But for every year that they are short in the 60-90 factor, they will take a 5 per cent reduction in the pension benefits earned after 2015, so only on earnings after 2015.

It's important to emphasize that retirement is a highly individualized decision. People take many factors into consideration, including whether or not the pension they have earned up to that point is enough to live on. So if a person decides that he or she does not have enough pension income to retire yet, they can continue to work a bit longer. In that extra time the person will add to his or her pension benefits, increase the final average salary, and lower the early retirement deductions. It isn't as long as people might think before they have the same amount as they would have had under the current rules. In some cases it's only a few months.

I also want to point out that most people in the plans today do not retire at 55. The average age of retirement in these plans is actually over 60, even with the current early retirement subsidies.

The next set of modest changes that we're introducing is to target cost-of-living increases instead of guaranteeing them. By targeting the cost-of-living increase instead of guaranteeing it, we give plan sponsors more tools and flexibility to manage the plans. The changes that we're making will create a safety valve that enables plan managers to withhold COLA in very bad years when they feel it's appropriate to do so. However, if things turn around, a catch-up COLA could be paid in a subsequent year. Mr. Speaker, what we're saying here is that if the plans are doing as well as some out there say that they will, then there is no issue in paying the COLA every year. But if the plans aren't, then the plan sponsors should have the ability to react.

Currently plan managers only have one lever to address the rising cost of pension plans, and that is to increase contribution rates for plan members and employees. That simply isn't sustainable, Mr. Speaker, as even the Auditor General has pointed out.

This leads me to the next change that we're introducing, a contribution rate cap. Alberta public servants currently pay among

the highest contribution rates in Canada. In fact, over the past 20 years contribution rates in our province have doubled. That's a significant amount of additional money coming off plan members' paycheques just to maintain the same level of benefits. Taxpayer-funded employers and plan members are telling us that the plans are already too expensive.

The passage of this act will allow us to establish a cap, but it should be pointed out that we have not yet determined what that cap will be. We will not set a cap without significant consultation with employers and labour groups just as we have been doing all along. Mr. Speaker, I would also add that the work document from when we talk to both the labour unions and to the plan members around the contribution cap, the conversation we're going to have, will be available very, very soon.

One of the other changes that we'll be implementing is a move to joint governance of the plans, and this is something that the unions have been asking us about for a period of time. Currently the unions claim employees do not have a share in the governance of these plans. Well, this is simply not true. Employees and their unions have representatives on the LAPP, PSPP, and the Special Forces Pension Board. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they have half the representation on those boards. They've had the power for over 20 years to recommend benefit changes. They have also had the power to increase contribution rates. They have done the latter, but they have never – never – done the former.

So why give more governance responsibilities to the unions? Well, we agree with them that the people who bear the costs and risks should have a say in the governance of those plans. They will have joint sponsorship with employers, which will allow them to decide on the benefits and the funding and the investment policies of the plans. The plans will also be managed by professional trustees, whose job it is to make sure the plans are financially sound and that they can deliver the benefits in the most cost-effective way. The changes we are making will reduce both cost and risk, which will decrease the potential for unsustainable future unfunded liabilities.

Mr. Speaker, across this country, across this nation, across North America, even in Europe – the Dutch had to make changes to their pensions, and some would say that that's where defined benefits came from – the case for pension reform is very, very clear.

I'm going to give the final word again to Mr. Jim Leech as I read another excerpt from his book. He says:

Our pension plans were not built to accommodate so many greying and long-living boomers. And unsteady markets can no longer make up for these structural failures. But none of these weaknesses have to be fatal if we repair them now.

He goes on to say:

If we ignore these reforms, we will bequeath future taxpayers and workers with a pension bill that . . . no one can afford. The solution to our crisis is smarter pension coverage, not less.

I agree fully with Mr. Leech's assessment.

The solution to the challenges we face is not to eliminate public pension plans as some in the opposition would say but to manage them in a better way. Contrary to what the labour groups are saying, this was my number one priority all along, to protect Alberta's defined benefit plans for the long term. These reforms, Mr. Speaker, will do just that.

I'd like to say thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 9.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10
Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans
Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Moving right along, I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014.

This proposed act will amend the Employment Pension Plans Act, which was passed by this Assembly with the support of all parties in the fall of 2012. The act was based upon the recommendations of the 2008 report put forward by the Joint Expert Panel on Pension Standards. The panel was struck when the governments of Alberta and British Columbia appointed a variety of experts to look into ways to harmonize and modernize the two provinces' private-sector pension plans legislation. While this act has been passed, it has not yet been proclaimed. As part of their recommendations the panel proposed a new type of pension plan called the targeted benefit plan and suggested that rules be developed to allow a defined benefit plan in the private sector to retroactively convert accrued defined benefits into targeted benefits.

For a number of years employers have been bringing forward concerns regarding the sustainability of their defined benefit plans. These employers have expressed a lot of interest in the target benefits proposal. In response to the interest expressed by employers, a policy change is required to permit the retroactive conversion. This proposed amendment reflects that policy change.

3:30

The conversion does transfer some risk to plan members. However, the regulation rules, developed in consultation with stakeholders, will be drafted to equitably deal with the risk transfer. It's important to note that the regulation rules will ensure members are aware of this risk and in agreement with the change before a plan may convert to a target benefit. Provisions to clarify the process for conversion to target benefit will be included as part of the regulation following discussion with stakeholders.

In addition, the changes I'm bringing forward in this amendment act also address housekeeping changes for consistency of wording. I want to be clear that this act does not affect the public-sector pension plans. Public-sector pensions are governed under a different act entirely, and their sustainability changes have been dealt with under a different bill, as we just talked about.

Let me explain to my colleagues in this Assembly why we believe this change is necessary. Many employers today are in a precarious situation when it comes to funding their employee pension plans. Their defined benefit pension plans are struggling to keep up with their pension promises, similar to the problems that we are facing in the public sector. People are living longer and, as such, collect pensions longer than they used to.

Pension plans are maturing, with the number of people collecting pensions from the plan being greater or equal to the number of people earning benefits under the plan. Factors such as plan maturity are causing ever-increasing costs to maintain a pension plan. As a result, pension plan sponsors increasingly rely on market returns to support plan funding.

When those investments don't work out, as we saw in 2008, the plans get into the situation where they develop unfunded liabilities. In the private sector the burden of these liabilities often falls to the employers alone. This has made it increasingly difficult

for them to keep up pension contributions. Employers we've met with have been quite frank, Mr. Speaker. They need more flexibility to deal with the skyrocketing costs of the plans, or they may stop offering them altogether.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes pension plans play an important role in retirement income. Currently only 1 in 6 private-sector employees in Alberta participates in a pension plan, and this is in danger of decreasing further if the existing plan costs aren't addressed. It's in the best interests of Albertans to ensure that whatever pension plan they're enrolled in, whether it's in the public sector or in the private sector, is sustainable in the long term. It is hoped these changes will give plan members peace of mind in knowing their plans will be there in retirement and ease the financial burden on the employers.

Target benefit plans were initially meant for union-sponsored, collectively bargained pension plans as a means of dealing with contribution limits tied to collective agreements. However, employers sponsoring non collectively bargained pension plans have also expressed an interest in these plans as a means of controlling costs. A target benefit plan establishes a level of benefits that it intends to pay to members at retirement and sets contribution rates so that there is a high probability that the target benefits will be paid to pensioners. However, benefits are not guaranteed and can be reduced if the plan is in financial difficulty.

The Employment Pension Plans Act permits all plans to apply target benefit rules for benefits earned in the future. The regulation coming out of the act allows collectively bargained plans to retroactively convert their defined benefit to target benefit based on rules that have already been developed.

Currently other plans do not have the same option. To maximize the cost-effectiveness of the conversion to target benefit, an employer needs to be able to convert all defined benefits into target benefits. In return, our regulation will include a clause that stipulates: plan members must be in agreement before a conversion can happen. I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker. In return, our regulation will include a clause that stipulates: plan members must be in agreement before a conversion can happen. In fact, a threshold of agreement must be met in order for the conversion to take place. This will mean that plan members will be consulted, and if a significant portion of members disagree with the conversion, it cannot go through.

We believe this is a fair solution to all parties involved, and I hope that all of my colleagues here will agree. In an era when pension plan coverage is very low, legislation should be aimed at supporting those who have pension plans to continue to do so and encouraging new plans to be developed. This amendment will contribute to that goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 10.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

Bill 6

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in third reading of Bill 6.

I believe that Bill 6, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014, only strengthens one of the most important

pieces of legislation that we've brought through this House in quite some time. This helps to protect the largest purchase that most of us will ever make. I'd like to thank all the members on all sides of this House for their supportive comments during second reading and Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill 6 contains some minor modifications to an existing act, and it proposes definitions that provide more clarity to the act. In discussion during Committee of the Whole there was an amendment introduced to extend the minimum warranty coverage. In fact, our legislation already has the best minimum coverage in Canada, and the regulation requires insurers to offer an option of extra coverage on building envelopes. Bill 6 also included significant consultation with stakeholders. Further increases to minimum warranty terms would have an extra cost on the building industry and homebuyers. I recognize the spirit of the proposed coverage, but it could be unnecessarily hard on the building industry to extend warranty coverage terms without consulting them first.

With respect to the \$750 owner-builder exemption application fee, discussed during Committee of the Whole, it is important to note that this fee is not comparable to the registration fee as these are two different processes. The \$95 registration fee is for development and maintenance of the program and comparable to other jurisdictions. The \$75 fee offsets costs of administering owner-builder applications, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot more work for the department for owner-builder applications, and the \$750 cost reflects it. The new requirements ensure that Albertans can still build their own homes, without warranty if they choose, while still protecting subsequent purchasers. This fee is not part of the legislation.

Other amendments will need to be made to the regulations: section references will need to be changed, some sections will need to be removed, and regulations for rental-use designation removals and appeals will be included. Where apartments are converted into condominiums, other provisions will need to be completed.

I ask for the support of all members for Bill 6. It brings more clarity to legislative provisions and follows stakeholder consultations in 2013. To recap, Mr. Speaker, this legislation provides amendments to the technical implementation of legislation that protects Albertans and helps build stronger communities, issues which we all agree on. With your support for the new legislation, we will begin work on regulation amendments to be in place later this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and move third reading of Bill 7, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 7 amends our personal and corporate income tax acts. These are mostly technical and administrative amendments. They parallel federal tax changes and will maintain consistency between federal and Alberta legislation. The amendments will also implement policy approved by this government in November 2013 to introduce a tax regime for qualifying environmental trusts, or

QETs, in Alberta to facilitate the accumulation of funds for future site reclamation.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed tax regime for QETs is revenue neutral and simply shifts the tax burden from the corporation to the QET. The tax credit provided under this regime eliminates the double tax that would otherwise occur as both the corporation and the QET are required to pay tax on the income each year. Corporations are currently allowed to deduct their QET contributions in computing income, and these amendments do not change that.

3:40

We appreciate the questions from the many members who took the time to consider this legislation and put forward their support and comments. I would like to thank the Member for Airdrie, who noted the support of his party for this legislation. The Member for Airdrie recognized the benefits of qualifying environmental trusts and the need to align Alberta's corporate and personal income tax legislation with the federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, the member is correct when he says that this is a good thing. The introduction of the QETs in Alberta is fiscally responsible and provides the most tax-efficient way to accumulate funds for future reclamation.

We also appreciate the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Centre when she said that she supports putting money away for the reclamation of pipelines and oil sands sites. With regard to concerns about the bankruptcy of a company the benefit of a QET is that the money accumulated in the QET is protected. Money can only be pulled out of a QET for site reclamation purposes.

Thank you also to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his questions about how trusts qualify. Mr. Speaker, the eligibility rules for QETs are set out under the federal Income Tax Act and must be met for a trust to qualify as a QET regardless of where the trust is established.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for his questions. With regard to his question about the number of QETs in Alberta, there were no QETs in Alberta in 2013. However, we do expect a handful of pipeline QETs to be established in the near future now that pipeline corporations are required to start funding future reclamation. We anticipate that oil sands corporations will also use QETs. However, given that the regime is just being introduced, we're not sure yet how many of these to expect in the long run.

With regard to the member's question about safeguards, Mr. Speaker, the money can only be pulled out of a QET to pay for the reclamation as prescribed by the federal Income Tax Act. Furthermore, QETs can be used by pipeline and oil sands corporations of any size.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the support that has been put forward in this House for this bill, and I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 7.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 8 Appropriation Act, 2014 (continued)

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, after such a nice speech by the Finance minister and knowing that this has been a very, very talked-about budget, I'm actually going to

just say a few words on this budget, just a few words, and hopefully we can go home early after one or two others.

Mr. Eggen: I don't think so. No.

Mr. Anderson: No? We can't go early?

Mr. Eggen: The school bell goes when the school bell goes, right?

Mr. Anderson: Oh, fine. It's almost Easter, goodwill and all that sort of thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the Wildrose has been very clear in its opposition to this budget. We feel that it is a grossly irresponsible budget. We feel that it is incumbent upon the government to pass a budget that sees both a balanced budget with no debt being accumulated and one that builds the infrastructure and provides the services that Albertans need and require. We do not think that this is an overly difficult task given the massive revenues that we are realizing as a province. We have record overall revenues coming into our coffers, record resource revenues coming into the coffers, unemployment, obviously, is very low, and lots of taxes are being paid. There is just no reason to be borrowing over \$5 billion this year alone. That is not a responsible thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I wish we had the resources of government, where we could see all of the requests that have come in from the departments for different infrastructure, all the requests from Alberta Health Services as they happen, and all the requests from the school boards with regard to schools and so forth so that we would have the information and data at our disposal to put together a prioritized infrastructure priority list that we could put online so everyone would see what the Wildrose proposed \$4 billion in infrastructure spending this year would build and what it would not build.

There's no doubt that we're not going to get into a bidding war with the PCs. That's not who we are. We are the party of fiscal responsibility and balanced budgets. We will never be able to outbid the PCs on spending, nor do we wish to.

That's something that we wish we could do. We wish we could put that information up, and there's no doubt that there would be some projects that might be deferred six months, some that might be deferred a year, some that might be deferred a year and a half. Others, like that wonderful, beautiful federal building, that we're all going to be moving into very soon against our wishes – we would defer those types of projects permanently, of course, as we would things like funding for carbon capture and storage and things like that.

There are ways to save in this budget. There are ways to build what we need while still balancing the budget, and we think that a government that is doing its job properly would be able to marry those two. We shouldn't be ones to play this, essentially, fearmongering card, where we say: if we don't borrow, we can't build anything. That's just not true. If we don't borrow, obviously we wouldn't be able to build as much as fast. But if we put our heads together, I am sure we could find a way to build without going into debt, with the amount of revenues we have right now.

We are in our highest income-earning years as a province right now. Things will continue, I hope, to be good for a while as we develop the oil sands and as the price of our resources remains high, but that will not last forever. At some point, in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years down the road, whenever it is, oil will not be worth

what it is today. We already see the amazing technologies being made in alternative energy. Those will over time drive the price of oil down, down, down just like the price of other resources over time has gone down, whether that be timber or coal or whatever. It has gone down not because we have run out of timber or coal; it has gone down because the demand for those resources has gone down. That's something that needs to be realized by this government.

In our high income-earning years we should not be going into debt. We should be building what we need. We should be being very careful with our pennies and putting as much as we can into high-priority infrastructure projects. I absolutely agree with that. But we should be balancing the budget, saving for the future, and not going into debt.

I think that we have a window left of 10 to 25 or 30 years where that's going to be possible, where we can put a lot of money away and not go into debt and have a mountain of investment capital to replace our ocean of resource wealth that we have. That would be one heck of a legacy to leave to our kids, that kind of financial security, knowing that we have that capital, that we will be able to use the interest for dozens and dozens of years over the next century. As Mr. Dinning, in his latest column in the *Calgary Herald*, said: we want to make sure we can be prosperous and have the ability to maintain our programs and use the wealth accrued from the oil sands for the next century or more. That's an incredible vision, and it's a vision that I and many others have in this House and in this province.

We can do that, but we can't do it if we're borrowing 20, 30 times more than we're saving. That doesn't work. We can't do that. [interjections] Or if it's 10 times more or five times more. It's amazing that the Finance minister still argues this point. They're putting away a few hundred million, and they're borrowing five billion, and somehow he doesn't think it's reasonable to say that they're borrowing 10 times more than they're saving. Of course, they are. Anybody with a calculator can figure that out. He talks about infrastructure and the importance of that. Of course it's important, but we can build what we need without borrowing and balance the budget. That is our number one critique of this.

You know, I don't understand why the government opposite doesn't understand where Albertans are at on this issue. We have polled this and polled it and talked to hundreds of people, as they have. I don't understand how they cannot be getting the same information that we are getting. Albertans agree with us on this. The reason for their low popularity right now is not because of one person going on one flight to South Africa. That's not the reason they're at 15 per cent in the polls. That's not the reason why they're about a point ahead of the Liberal party right now. That's not the reason. The reason is because they have lost the confidence of Albertans on a number of key files, and one of those key files is the finance file.

3:50

If you look at their trust rating on that, they have a negative trust rating of over 70 per cent on finance right now in this province, about 72 per cent, and an approval rating in the high teens on that. Now, if they want to go into an election with that kind of approval, well, I guess they go into an election with that. But they shouldn't. They need to turn this ship around. I hope that whomever the successor is – I'm assuming it's probably not someone from that caucus over there. If it's someone from the outside, I hope that they run and are elected on a platform of balancing the budget, not going into debt, and making sure that they are balancing the consolidated budget on a go-forward basis. I really hope for the best for that individual, whomever it is.

Mr. Horner: Are you going to throw your hat in?

Mr. Anderson: No. I know you're going to throw your hat in, though. That should be interesting. You should take a shot at it. It'd be interesting. Yeah. I don't know; maybe I'll vote for you.

Anyway, we do look forward to that. That will be the happiest "I told you so" ever given when I get to look across and see them say: we are committed to not going into debt. When they say that in this House, with that new leader, I'm going to be as pleased as punch, and I'll give that person a standing ovation for doing it. I will. Mark my words. I will stand up and applaud that man, even if he's on that side, if he says that. I'm looking forward to it. Make me stand and do that. I beg you.

Mr. Dorward: It could be a woman.

Mr. Anderson: It could be a woman. Absolutely it could be. I think the next elected Premier of Alberta will be a woman, in fact. [interjections] She sure will.

Anyway, how would we do that? I mean, we could go over all of these. Obviously, we as the Wildrose have put out our 2014 budget recommendations, and several of them, of course, deal with leadership at the top with regard to MLA salaries, cabinet minister pay, the size of the Public Affairs Bureau, bonuses, severance packages, government travel, all of these things. These are all things we can look at and show an example to Albertans on. That is another reason why this government is having troubles with the people right now. They've really lost trust with regard to walking the walk and showing an example. I think that's pretty clear.

We would end corporate welfare. That used to be standard operating procedure for this PC Party. It was a proud tradition. At some point, you know, over the last several years that has gone by the wayside. We are guaranteeing loans for billions of dollars to companies like North West Upgrading. We're giving hundreds of millions of dollars to companies like Shell Canada and so forth. It's very disappointing that we're doing that, that we're picking winners and losers in the economy. We need to get out of the business of being in business, as the PC Party once was.

We need to really look at the bureaucracy, of course, and find a way that we can limit the growth of the size of the bureaucracy and get more jobs and positions and money flowing to the front lines – more nurses, more social workers, people on the front lines – and fewer people working in the offices at AHS and other bureaucracies of government. We'd like to see a real stress on that, to improve social services without necessarily having to spend more but simply moving the resources to higher priority areas.

We've already talked about infrastructure, of course, and zero-based budgeting, which we would say is much different than this results-based budgeting process. I hope that at some point they find a way to decrease FTEs, full-time equivalents, there on the government side through this results-based budgeting process. They have not yet been able to. Hopefully, one day they will.

We believe that every dollar should be justified every three years in each department so that we can make sure that programs don't become outdated and positions don't become outdated and so forth, so we can justify every cent that's being spent in government and do so in a way that doesn't affect services negatively.

Obviously, we believe we can strengthen the Auditor General's office a bit more so that he's doing more value-for-money audits. Roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of his time is spent on essentially auditing the reports of government, that they put on

their annual reports and so forth. I don't particularly think that that's an overly effective use of his time. If he wants to do that, great; then give him the resources to do that. But also give him the resources to do more value-for-money audits, because every dollar spent there saves us \$10, as far as I'm concerned.

Establish a waste-buster program protected by whistle-blower legislation. Let's get the public service involved in finding waste and identifying waste and blowing the whistle on waste and find a way to reward them for blowing the whistle and protect their jobs and so forth.

Those are some of the ideas that we would put forward. I feel very strongly that we'd be able to balance the budget, not go into debt, build the infrastructure that Albertans require, commit to the services that Albertans need, and do so in a fiscally responsible manner. We will not be supporting this budget because it does not do those things.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that everyone – everyone – in this Legislature except the Finance minister would oppose this budget. I'm sure that will happen. I'm sure it will.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest to make some comments on this 2014 budget. It took a long time, I think, to sort through this budget because of the Byzantine sort of way in which budgets are presented these days in this Legislature. So many people have made comments about the way that both assets and liabilities and expenditures have been presented over these past number of months.

Certainly, on the very most global level, I would be so appreciative – I think all Albertans would – if we rationalized the way we present these numbers so that people can understand. You have money in, money out. You have revenues; you have expenditures. We don't need all of these separate budgets, that take, as I say, sort of a PhD in economics to be able to sort through. The Auditor General, who's been quoted so often here – I think his ears are burning because he probably doesn't appreciate it – does say, certainly, that the way that we do report here is less than transparent. I think that all Albertans would appreciate a way by which they could enter it into their calculator and find a more clear balance between whether we're in debt, where our revenues are, and how we are spending them.

Again, as an Alberta New Democrat it's very important for me to ensure that we are moving the wealth of this province in an equitable way to reflect the hard work and the investment that Albertans have put into this province over their working lifetimes and retirement, to ensure that we invest in our young people so that they are getting the very best education possible and that no one is excluded from that education due to how much money they happen to have in their pocket, that we are investing to strengthen our public health system so that it is there now and for the future and that it is a publicly delivered system, that can provide the security for you and your family to know that that public health system will be there for when you need it for yourself and for your family.

Unfortunately, considering the great wealth that we have in this province – I mean, this is always the subtext of so many of these budgets that I've seen over the years. Yes, a lot of money flows through this province, but, no, a lot of the money doesn't hit the ground and stay with value-added investment that can benefit the most people for the longest period of time.

You know, I listen as an English teacher and a student of language and so often hear how misrepresented our financial position is and where the money is going. We hear this so often: oh, well, we all have to tighten our belts. First one, right? Well, this is a cliché, Mr. Speaker, but it also is a deliberate misrepresentation of the fact that (a) our economy is growing at a greater rate than most places around the industrialized world and (b) our population is growing, too, commensurate with or even exceeding that economic growth rate. You cannot expect Albertans, who live inside a growing economy and a growing population, to swallow the tale that somehow we are in a period of austerity and we all have to tighten our belts. This is neither logical, Mr. Speaker, nor is it a reflection of the world which regular Albertans live in every single day. When we as Alberta New Democrats travel from Fort McMurray down to Medicine Hat, we see each of these jurisdictions in between growing, both in population and economy.

4:00

So as a responsible government, as the Legislature disbursing billions of dollars to provide essential social services, we must make sure that we are growing those responsibilities which we have been vested here in the Legislature, commensurate with the population and commensurate with the growth of the economy. If we fail to do so, then we are abdicating that responsibility. We are not fulfilling that responsibility, and you end up with all of the trouble that we see through essential things that we own together, that public interest, which erodes year by year, albeit more slowly, probably, than in some other conservative jurisdictions because we have that extra money to be able to put back in there. But slowly but surely, Mr. Speaker, the public interest is being eroded, and in 2014 there is no exception to that erosion. This budget maintains the status quo, where it doesn't really do much for the future well-being of all Albertans together in an equitable, in an equal, and in a socially just manner.

This latest budget is a prime example of how this government is out of touch with regular Alberta families and with the economic pressures that take place even when you're in an economic boom or in a period of economic growth, where the costs for an average family living in this province often exceeds the wealth that is heading back to that same family through their work and through the public services that we're meant to provide here in the province.

So many examples of ways by which this great wealth that flows through this province fails to touch regular Albertan families, and the idea of this trickle down, this sort of measly idea of crumbs, perhaps, dispersing through the economy is more of an insult than it is a reflection of what actually does happen: \$150 million in in-kind royalties to oil corporations that, in fact, should be paying us for our natural resources, not the other way around; \$8.6 million dollars in corporate subsidies to industry in the postsecondary education budget; and a million-dollar increase to the Premier's office as well.

Middle-class families are also feeling the effects of this year's budget, with no real investment in postsecondary education despite a \$147 million cut last year; no funding for full-day kindergarten, part of the promise that brought this current government into power at this particular juncture; a \$120 million cut to seniors' drug benefits; and the continuation, Mr. Speaker, of, I think, the very, very serious problem of the flat-tax, which demonstrates very clearly that middle-income people actually pay more tax in Alberta than in other jurisdictions around the country.

With extra revenue coming in, Mr. Speaker, this budget should have been a really great opportunity for this government to

actually invest in Alberta's families. Instead, once again they've been left behind, and as I say with the bills coming in, people are finding it difficult even though you have employment in the family. The PCs have continued their attack on the most vulnerable in this province. Not only have they given up, it seems, on the idea to eliminate child poverty, cut \$20 million from PDD, with huge cuts to programs that help low-income families get out of poverty, and funded Human Services well below the rate of inflation and population growth. This government, in my mind, does not understand the priorities of Albertans.

Fortunately, we do have a democracy, though, so we do have other voices, both inside and outside the Legislature, that will struggle for a more equitable change. Our party, the Alberta New Democrats, will continue to fight for regular Alberta families that are squeezed by these policies and to stand up for vulnerable Albertans who are attacked in this budget.

We expected a lot more, Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget, and quite honestly we believe that average Albertans did expect more as well. Right from the start of the session, for example, we've been talking about this idea of prosperity but how the prosperity is not making its way down to regular Albertan families. A tale of two Albertas, I venture to say.

Some examples, I think, of how we could have done better, how we could have turned this around and, perhaps, over the course of these next few months, how we might revisit some of these issues that are particularly fractious, I would say. For example, the University of Alberta specifically asked the minister to reinvest in their infrastructure maintenance program in order to avoid "catastrophic failure of some of [their] buildings systems." Instead, Budget 2014 allocates millions of dollars in corporate subsidies to industry in postsecondary instead of the institutions themselves. Despite a \$147 million cut last year there was no reinvestment in postsecondary education, meaning that our secondary institutions will remain inaccessible for so many Alberta students that simply can't afford the tuition and to live and to go to school full-time. For the rest of us the cost is unnecessarily expensive.

There's still no funding, Mr. Speaker, towards full-day kindergarten, so parents are forced to pay more to give that early childhood education, to have extra child care costs, and so forth. Combine this with the changes to the curriculum that we've seen over these last couple of years, and again K to 12 education is feeling the pinch. We see larger class sizes than we ever have over this past decade or more since I left teaching. It's astounding to see the size of high school classes exceeding 35 or 40 students in a class. You simply cannot deal with that properly, to give the education that young people need. The idea that this would continue to erode – it was almost never a practice in Edmonton public before to have something exceeding, like, 30 students in a high school class. Now it's the new normal, and that new normal is unacceptable.

The Minister of Health promised to scrap the changes to seniors' drug benefits, but still there seems to be \$120 million somehow left in limbo. What's changed there? I find that very disturbing. Of more than a billion dollars that the federal government just gave this province specifically for health care, really not more than \$600 million of that money went into the Health budget. So while we have a Canada Health Act, while we have Canada health transfers, somehow that cash has not been put back into our public health system even though the money was specifically earmarked based on a formula, based on the population growth, and the needs growth of our province. It was adjusted for that need specifically, yet somehow those federal

transfers did not go back into our public health system, where they should have been invested.

Budget 2014 should have been the time when this PC government took action to help Alberta families, and they failed to do so. More than 400,000 Albertans live in poverty and a very high percentage of children. Poverty costs \$7 billion a year in this province for increased demands on public services. As I said before, clearly, the promise to eliminate child poverty has been passed down the wayside even though our economy is growing significantly. Instead of reversing the cuts to PDD, this government has continued the trend and cut significantly from these programs.

This budget had all sorts of spending issues, but I would also say that it had lots of inefficiencies and waste as well built into the budget. This whole idea of investing, giving industry so much money for carbon capture and storage – right? – is an absolute waste of money. We know full well that this is just another way for enhanced oil recovery. It's another way for large energy corporations to receive public funding, and there's very little evidence that this very expensive public investment will pay any significant returns either to our environment or to the original plant to which it was intended.

We saw the increased spending around the Premier's office. Again, it was not a lot of actual dollars when we're talking about a multibillion-dollar issue, but I think it was a question of losing trust in expenditures that the Alberta public picked up on, and this has stayed with this government now. It doesn't matter if we're spending a dollar or if we're spending a thousand dollars or a million dollars. If it's not being spent in an equitable and fair way, people pick up on that. Unfortunately, it's caused a great deal of consternation amongst Albertans. I think they have an honest view of this. The unfortunate part, as I described before, is this loss of trust, this loss of the public trust, that we need to regain more than ever, in this institution that continues to be eroded away.

4:10

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, there's a question of this budget. I was expecting something that maybe would more directly reflect the PC election platform by which they were elected in the first place in 2012, this idea of departing from a traditional sort of conservative base and, in fact, making a wider investment in the more diverse and larger population that we see in this province right now. Alberta is the most urbanized province in Canada, and we see an incredible influx of population, of immigration for jobs coming not just from the rest of Canada but from around the world.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, things just didn't go my way this afternoon. I was hoping to be able to speak to this earlier, but that's not what happened. Now I have a couple of minutes before you're going to call the vote.

I'm really struggling with this budget. Earlier my colleague had asked that when we did the votes from the estimates, we pull out

the ministries of Aboriginal Affairs and Agriculture because he, having been in the budget debates, felt that they were reasonable amounts of money, and he wanted to be able to vote in support of those two budgets. But in going through the rest of the departments, for various reasons, either because we felt there was mismanagement or broken promises or there wasn't enough funding being given or there was too much funding being given, we couldn't support the budget estimates for the rest of the departments. In the end we had to with the exception of those two ministries vote against the budget as presented.

Mr. Speaker, that doesn't mean that we, you know, don't want civil servants to get paid, but it is a way of registering how we would have done the budget if we were in a position to do so and where we really think the government is going off track with what they're doing.

I'm going to look forward to being able to speak to the appropriation bill, Bill 8, in Committee of the Whole, and I'm giving fair warning now that I'd like to speak the first time the bill comes up and not the second so I get cut off after three minutes because I would like to talk a bit more about the departments that I wasn't able to participate in the budget debates on.

Because the government now forces us into a situation where often two departments are debated at the same time, I don't get into most of the other departments because I'm in another room. So on behalf of my constituents who want me to speak, for example, on seniors' issues or health or infrastructure or education or advanced education, I don't get a chance anymore to be in those budget debates. So this is my opportunity to talk about where I see the pluses and minuses and where, as it often does with the budgets for this government, the ideology trumps the common sense and management of the actual finances, and I have great difficulty with that.

In second reading we're supposed to be speaking for or against the principle of the bill that's presented in front of us, and I'm not willing to support the principle of what's included in the budget that's been given to us. You know, I was joking earlier with one of my colleagues that sometimes when I hear the hon. members opposite answer questions, I could swear to you that there are little government phrases that are on strips of paper, and they put them in a hat, and then they just pull them out randomly, and five of them make an answer. That's kind of how I feel about this budget.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The time has expired, and I'm now required under Standing Order 64(3) to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn to 1:30 on Tuesday, April 22.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:16 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to April 17, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft.), 146-54 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 184-87 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 217-18 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 226-28 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 231-34 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2014; SA 2014 cS-2.5]

2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 84 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 154-56 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187-88 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c2]

3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)

First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143-45 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c3]

4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 145-46 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 184 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 191-93 (Mar. 11, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 229 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 250 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft.), 330 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 119 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 174 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 188-90 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 218-20 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 228-29 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 230 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c1]

6 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Minister of Municipal Affairs)

First Reading -- 300 (Mar. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 330-31 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft.), 417-21 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 493-503 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 522-23 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., adjourned)

7 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 488-93 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 523 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 8 Appropriation Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 488 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 519-20 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 523-27 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
- 9 Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 484 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 520-21 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., adjourned)
- 10 Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 484-85 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 522 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., adjourned)
- 201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 (Kubinec)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 123-34 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship)
- 202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 264-79 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., defeated on division)
- 203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 249 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 352-61 (Apr. 7, 2014 aft.), 444-50 (Apr. 14, 2014 aft., passed)
- 204 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014 (Barnes)**
First Reading -- 263-64 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 450-52 (Apr. 14, 2014 aft., adjourned)
- 205 Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 22, 2014

Issue 21

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Let us pray that our strength will be renewed as we begin this new week of duty and service in this Assembly. May wisdom, patience, and civility guide our speech and actions on behalf of those whom we serve. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem. Further to the memo I sent out to each of you on April 4, in which I indicated that there might be circumstances where others would lead us in the singing of the national anthem, today is one of those days. I'm very pleased to have with us the Bonnyville Tune-Agers senior choir, who will now lead us in the singing of *O Canada*.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, hon. members. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly 28 grade 6 and grade 12 students from Satoo school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Gordon Garritty, and parent helpers Eunice Tan, Janice McGillivray, and Charles Tompkins. I request that you please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an enthusiastic, outgoing group of students from George P. Nicholson elementary school that are here for the School at the Legislature this week. I've had the pleasure of meeting with this friendly group of grade 6 students several times this year. I believe that they have a strong sense of community, which is fostered by the unique design of their school, which houses a health clinic and a daycare. Minister of Infrastructure, please take note. There is also great support from their teacher, the beautiful Mrs. Sprague, and parent volunteers such as Marcel Balino, Dilushi Perera, and Vivienne Garbutt. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you some of the best and the brightest of the Leslieville school. I want to point out, as some members of this Assembly may remember, that Leslieville registered this last winter, on one particular day, as the coldest place on earth. Wow. What a record for an Alberta community. But they are the warmest hearts in all of Alberta. With their teacher, Ms Colleen Rudd, and the principal, Mr. Stanton Swain I would like to welcome them and to have all of these students rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups? I'm sorry. Edmonton-Decore – my apologies – followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A piece of Alberta's history is going to be made today. It is my privilege and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Alberta Legislature two school groups from St. Philip Catholic school. The students who are here today certainly are leaders of tomorrow, and we'll have to wait to see what their contribution to Alberta's history is going to be. Also, the gentlemen in one of the school groups are wearing bow ties today, so bow ties rock. They're joined today by Mrs. Garet Dafoe, teacher, and Mr. Matthew Charrois, teacher. I would ask that the students from St. Philip Catholic elementary school please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the wonderful Tune-Agers, a seniors-only choir from my beautiful constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake; their founder, Lil Bodnar; and their director, Sharon Sharun. They are seated in your gallery, and I would ask them and their bus driver, Gil Proulx, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the spirit of improving the child intervention system, it's my privilege to introduce a number of people here today for first reading of a bill that I'll have later this afternoon. First of all, it's my pleasure to introduce Chief Wilton Littlechild today as a newly appointed member of the Child Intervention Implementation Oversight Committee. As you may know, Chief Littlechild is a member and former chief of the Ermineskin Cree Nation, a former Member of Parliament, a current member of the United Nations human rights Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and a commissioner for the Indian residential schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It's my privilege and honour at this point to ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. Joining Chief Littlechild are a number of individuals that are here today in support of our bill. First of all, is Monique Marinier, a panel participant at the Child Intervention Roundtable in January, who is representing youth in care; and Samantha Wipf, who is also representing children in care and was at our round-table as well. On behalf of the Member for Lesser Slave Lake I'm pleased to welcome members of the Metis Child and Family Services Society, starting with their leader, Donald Langford, then Donna Kratky, Amanda

Collins, Kari Thomason, Mary Dion, Lorna Audette, Kaila Eisel, Claude Gallant, Bernice Gladue, Kayla Simms, Kym Pelletier, Kelly Klause, Kyle Lafond, Shirley West, Lezlee Martin, Rebecca Countaway, Angela Walsh, Harry Fuccaro, and J. Langford. It's my pleasure to have them here to join us today for what will be an exciting introduction of our bill.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you a resident of Killarney, Manitoba. He has travelled a long way to learn first-hand about Alberta politics while visiting his family here in Alberta. Dale Banman is an economic development officer for the Turtle Mountain region, a great place to visit in southwest Manitoba. He is also the father of one of the hard-working and talented communications staff for the Wildrose caucus, Tim Banman. I'd ask Dale to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests today, Gemalil Bischoch and Marco Luciano from Migrante Alberta. Migrante Alberta is a community-based organization committed to the protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of Filipino immigrants and migrant workers in Alberta. Migrante Alberta takes the position that the migration of Filipinos abroad is a product of the extreme poverty and joblessness in the Philippines and that the commodification of Filipino labour is encouraged by the Philippine government's labour export policy. Migrante is a member of Migrante Canada, a Canada-wide alliance of Filipino migrant organizations in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. I would now ask Marco and Gemalil to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Teresa Schmidt, Teresa Budzick, and Theresia Brokamp, all visiting Alberta and Lacombe county from Germany. They're here today with Edie Biel of Billyco Junction Gardens in Lacombe county. Billyco Junction Gardens is a WWOOF farm host, and these girls are here from Germany because of the WWOOF Canada program. What does the WWOOF stand for, you ask? It's World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. These girls will be living and working on the farm for a few weeks and will get a chance to get to know the Canadian way of life. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions today. First, it's truly a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Michelle and Jeff Bates, two very close friends of mine and community leaders for the city of Airdrie. I'll be touching a little bit on their story later today in Members' Statements. Michelle and Jeff were instrumental in establishing the Airdrie Health Foundation; in fact, Michelle is its co-chair. The foundation works to see overall health and the delivery of health care in Airdrie improved, and they are also a strong voice and advocate for 24-hour emergency services in the community and area. They have been working tirelessly for a modern, state-of-the-art 24-hour medical facility suitable for

Airdrie. Michelle and Jeff have two wonderful girls, aged five and seven, and they are seated today in the gallery to watch our presentation of the Airdrie 24 petition. I'd ask the members to give them a warm welcome.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, staying with that theme of great folks from Airdrie, is of one of the councillors for Airdrie city council, Mr. Allan Hunter. Alderman Hunter has been on council since 2010 and is currently serving his second term. He has lived in Airdrie for the past nine years. He and his wife have a daughter and son. Allan has also been a strong voice for improving health care in Airdrie and is an active board member for the Airdrie Health Foundation. He's also a great guy and is very famous for his belt buckles, cowboy boots, and common-sense approach to getting things done. I'd like to thank him for his service and hope we could all give him a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very strong advocates for youth engagement in Alberta. My first guest is Timurlane Cakmak. Timurlane has attended both of the youth think tanks we've held and has given his input on how government, in particular the Youth Secretariat, can continue to engage youth. He's an active student at the University of Alberta, competing with the track and field team, and is a team lead for Caring for Campus. He is also a yoga and indoor cycling instructor in his hometown of Leduc.

My second guest is Kyle St. Thomas, who is also a fantastic advocate for the engagement of youth. He is currently premier, which is an elected position, of the TUXIS Parliament of Alberta and is involved in Caring for Campus. Next year he will be the recreation co-ordinator for Campus Saint-Jean. He currently lives in residence and comes from Lacombe, Alberta.

I would ask both to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have two minutes each for these statements. Let's start with Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Airdrie.

Lil Bodnar and the Bonnyville Tune-Agers

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to stand here at the Legislature to talk about my good friend Lil Bodnar and her Tune-Agers. I have known Lil for close to 40 years. Her husband, Ted Bodnar, was my principal when I started teaching in Glendon, and I finished my career teaching in a school named after her father, H.E. Bourgoin. Lil is 87 years young. A couple of years ago she created a bucket list that she wanted to complete. One of the items on her bucket list was to visit our Legislature, which she'd never done before, and to sing *O Canada*. Thanks to you, Mr. Speaker, her dream has come true, and she can cross this off her bucket list.

Music is in Lil's blood. She was instrumental in starting the Bonnyville Society Singers over 25 years ago, and 16 years ago she founded the Bonnyville Tune-Agers, a group of the best singing seniors in Bonnyville and surrounding area. The Tune-Agers are very active in my constituency. Every year they put on two concerts for three seniors' centres in our constituency. They also perform at weddings, anniversary parties, and many events in the area too numerous to list. In 2003 and 2008 the Tune-Agers

sponsored a Seniors' Choir Festival and plan to have another festival this May back at home in Bonnyville.

Thank you to Lil and their director, Sharon Sharun, an honorary senior and a former colleague of mine, for coming to Edmonton. Enjoy your tour of the Legislature. May God bless you all. Keep singing, and provide music everywhere you go.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome, all.

Airdrie Health Foundation

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, Michelle and Jeff Bates lost their precious little boy Lane four and a half years ago. We still don't fully understand how it happened. He was an active, healthy, and kind little boy, but one night he felt sick, and his parents did what every parent in Airdrie would have done. They decided that rather than waiting hours in an emergency room in Calgary, they would let him rest and take him to a doctor the next morning if he wasn't feeling better. Tragically, Lane passed during the night.

Obviously, this experience was devastating for Jeff and Michelle, but instead of permitting despair to overwhelm them and retreating from life, Michelle and Jeff showed a level of courage and strength that is difficult to comprehend. They were determined that Lane's premature passing would leave a legacy of love and care for others. So, Mr. Speaker, the Airdrie Health Foundation was founded, with Michelle as chair.

AHF has quickly become the primary driving force in the campaign to bring 24-hour health care to Airdrie. Along with Michelle it includes Airdrie's political leaders, health professionals, and business and nonprofit communities. All have come together towards the common goal of providing better access to health care for the people of Airdrie, including around-the-clock urgent health care services. It has been so effective in its efforts that Alberta Health Services has taken notice and, to their credit, has established a formal working group, including senior AHS executives, to work with the AHF in designing a health care model for Airdrie that focuses on improving primary care and bringing 24-hour health care to Airdrie. I applaud AHS and the minister for their involvement and for recognizing Airdrie's exploding growth.

Today I will present the first 2,400 signatures of Airdrie residents who are requesting that this government and AHS work with AHF to establish 24-hour health services for Airdrie, and many more thousands of signatures will be following.

Mr. Speaker, Jeff and Michelle may have to wait a little while to be with their sweet son again, but Lane's legacy on this Earth is already larger than anyone could have dreamed. It's a legacy of love that Lane and his parents, though separated for now, are building and growing together one day at a time.

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

Invasive Mussel Species

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on a very important issue; that is, aquatic invasive species, particularly zebra or quagga mussels. Anyone familiar with these tiny freshwater mollusks will know that their infestation results in objects being completely encompassed by these miniature creatures, creating a surface almost like concrete. High populations of these mussels in other jurisdictions along the eastern seaboard, including the Great Lakes, have led to an ecosystem shift that affects commercial and recreational fish populations. They've

been linked to blue-green algae blooms and have significantly impacted infrastructure, irrigation, property values, and recreational activities. This could result in \$75 million per year being expended to clean, repair, and replace infrastructure here in Alberta.

1:50

This government is the owner and operator of more than \$8 billion in water management infrastructure; for example, dams, irrigation canals, and pumping equipment. An infestation of zebra mussels could result in major financial losses not only for the government but for the farmers who irrigate southern Alberta and rely on irrigation to grow our agricultural products. The amount of damage these small creatures can cause is exponential to their size.

It's important for the government and the public to work in tandem to ensure that this invasive species stays out of Alberta. ESRD is aware, but unfortunately at this point there are no budget dollars. Watercraft owners, particularly those who use their boats in the southern U.S., should always remember to completely clean their motors and boats and drain water from buckets, live wells, and coolers before they return to Canada.

Albertans play an important role in protecting our waterways from aquatic invasive species and should educate themselves to be proactive about keeping our aquatic ecosystems safe so that we will all enjoy Alberta's lakes and rivers.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have 35 seconds maximum for a question and 35 seconds maximum for an answer. I appreciate the notes that you've sent regarding my enforcement of that rule.

Let us begin with the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Spring Flood Preparedness

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I have some important questions about the freedom of information process, but first I want to ask about flood preparedness. First thing this morning Environment Canada put out a special weather statement. They're predicting that heavy rain will begin early tomorrow over central Alberta and that almost three inches of rain can be expected in the foothills northwest of Red Deer. They warn that "some areas may be particularly sensitive to flooding due to already high water levels from the spring melt." Can the government reassure Albertans that our flood monitoring process is ready for this?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can say that our flood response program is in place and ready to go. Again, we don't control the weather, but I can say to you that we're ready to move if we have to.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I asked the government questions on this topic on April 10. The environment minister replied that the government would increase the monitoring of rivers in June, and he talked a lot about the eastern slopes. Well, it's still April, and the area under threat this time is further north. Can the government assure Albertans that they have learned from last year's mistakes and that they have upped the monitoring of potential high water everywhere there's a risk?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say that, first of all, we didn't make any mistakes last year. We had rainfall of unprecedented proportions. We had 214 millimetres in a 24-hour period. The

rainfall was so hard and the flood so devastating that it wiped out our monitors.

Mr. Speaker, we've put more monitoring in place. Our people on the ground are ready to give 24-hour response, and we'll be ready to go.

Ms Smith: For us to learn from mistakes, we have to admit them, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't appear that the government is ready to do that.

This government has been slow to adjust the needs of our foothills communities. Rain on snow events can be extremely dangerous. Last year's rains in Kananaskis Country resulted in the devastating southern Alberta floods. Many places in central Alberta are equally at risk should there be a major rain on snow event. Can the government assure Albertans that they have worked with all communities in the central and northern foothills to be sure that they are flood ready?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier to the other question, we have people on the ground, we have monitoring in place, and we will be able to get a hold of the communities as soon as we have to. Again, we have no control over the weather, so we will be monitoring on a 24-hour basis to make sure that we're prepared to move forward.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. leader.

FOIP Request Process

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A government whistleblower leaked us an e-mail that states the following:

On November 29, 2013, the former Deputy Premier circulated a Memorandum to the Premier and Cabinet requesting that Ministers gather information about materials being released by their departments and that their press secretaries gather information about active FOIP requests which have the potential to generate media, session, political or other reputational issues for government. It was requested this information be sent to his office by noon Fridays in the template provided.

What does the Premier say about this?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would say that it would be quite normal, when information is made public, that the people who are making it public be aware of that information as it goes out. There's no interference with the process, but it's very important for us to know what that information is. I'll give you an example. In December a FOIP request was made about deaths of children in care who had been touched by care. I was briefed on that the day it went out, as I appropriately should have been.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday we asked the Premier to confirm that neither his office nor any other minister's office was undermining the integrity or independence of the freedom of information process, and he glibly said yes. This memo was written by the Deputy Premier and circulated to all of cabinet. It instructed that ministers gather information about materials being released by their departments and that information be sent to the Deputy Premier by noon every Friday. Does the Premier think this is the right thing to do?

Mr. Hancock: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, what the hon. member is talking about is that as information goes out the door, it would be prudent to be aware of what's going out the door so you know how to respond to it when the people who get it, including the media or others, ask questions about it. At the time it

goes out the door, it's public information and quite appropriate to share.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the freedom of information process exists to prevent the government from suppressing and hiding damaging information about their mistakes, and the process is supposed to work free of political interference, yet the memo asked that the very political press secretaries to the various ministers should assemble the information in the template provided and send it to the Deputy Premier's office. If this isn't political interference in the FOIP process, what is it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is trying to again create something out of nothing. What happens in the FOIP process is that the FOIP co-ordinators in our departments respond to FOIP requests. When the information goes out the door, it's quite appropriate for ministers to be made aware of that information because if it comes from their department, they ought to know that it's going out, and they ought to know how to respond to it. Press secretaries are doing exactly that job on behalf of their ministers, being aware of what is public information and advising on what the appropriate responses are.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third and final set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's not the answer he gave us last week. Last Thursday the Premier said that he wasn't aware of any cabinet ministers who reviewed FOIP weekly summary reports. At the time he said that it was "an administrative function." Now we know that the Deputy Premier requested a different kind of weekly summary report, and that one definitely wasn't administrative in nature. It was handled by ministerial press secretaries, who are paid to be political. Why are embarrassing FOIPs being assembled and vetted by ministerial press secretaries?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is talking about two different things. The Deputy Minister of Executive Council has a role to play with respect to FOIP co-ordinators across government. There was a memo that went out from him. It clearly talked about the FOIP requests and a specific FOIP request, as a matter of fact, which dealt with things that were potentially cabinet information and therefore had to be screened from that perspective. That's an entirely different issue than the former Deputy Premier asking that when information is being released, all press secretaries be made aware of it so that the ministers can be briefed as to what . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the leaked e-mail we have from the whistle-blower makes it clear that there is crossgovernment co-ordination for dealing with FOIPs and that there is another highly political process for assembling politically sensitive FOIPs. It is clear from the e-mail that we have that routine FOIP requests are being revised and massaged. In fact, in this e-mail there's a specific reference to revisions on three requests. If routine FOIPs are being revised, how can Albertans have any confidence that this government isn't fixing FOIPs that harm the government's reputation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: The Leader of the Opposition has a habit of asking questions about things of people who may not know the facts on this particular matter. She should know that this particular memo was actually proofread by the Privacy Commissioner – the

wording was approved, and then it was subsequently sent out – for the very reason that the Premier right now is indicating.

Ms Smith: I'm not sure why they were so afraid to admit to that last week, then, Mr. Speaker.

Our freedom of information process is under threat from this government, that likes to brag that it's transparent and accountable. The truth is that, for all the bragging, this government resists transparency and never wants to be accountable for its mistakes. All over this government thoughtful and committed provincial employees see that, and they are coming to us to try to do something about it. Will the Premier start afresh with an all-party review of Alberta's freedom of information laws so that Albertans can be reassured that our process isn't going to continue to be politicized?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the associate minister responsible has spent almost the better part of a year going around Alberta and talking with Albertans about the freedom of information and protection of privacy process and will be bringing that back to this Legislature at an appropriate time. We have talked about freedom of information many times as an automatic review of the act on a regular basis, and the only thing which threatens the FOIP process is the indiscriminate use of it by the opposition, who want to FOIP everything in the world, including – and I presume it's them because I don't get to know who asks the questions – a request for all of the ARs in government, which could be a million.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

2:00 Public Service Pensions

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 the cowboys on Wall Street crashed the economy, causing the unfunded liability of public-sector pensions to spike to \$7.5 billion. Employees stepped up in Alberta by increasing their contributions and forgoing wage increases in favour of matching government contributions. As a result, the liability is down to \$6.4 billion, and the Minister of IIR says that pensions are healthy and will be fully funded in 12 years, at which time contributions will drop. Premier, the crisis has passed, so why are you launching a Republican-style attack on the pensions of public-sector workers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would hardly classify this as a Republican-style attack. We are not changing the pension promise. In fact, what we are doing is defending the pension promise. The age of retirement before the changes we introduced in the Legislature was 65. The age of retirement after the legislation, hopefully, is passed in this House will be 65. We are making changes to two things. The early retirement subsidy: we're not getting rid of it; we're actually keeping it and making it sustainable. The second thing we're doing is that we're ensuring that there are funds available to pay cost-of-living adjustments into the future. Hardly radical.

Dr. Sherman: Defending pensions by cutting them: please, we don't want your defence, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, too many seniors in Alberta already struggle to survive on insufficient pensions, and the PC plan to reduce cost-of-living adjustments will only worsen the problem by depriving future retirees of enough money to pay their bills, thus retiring them into poverty. The Premier used to be Health minister. He knows how expensive poverty is, and he knows how much it will cost in terms of extra health care and subsidized housing. Premier,

why are you bringing in a cold-hearted policy which is so obviously penny-wise and pound-foolish?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member really, clearly does not understand what is happening and ought to go back and review the material again. The major change with respect to cost of living is going from a defined cost-of-living adjustment process to a targeted one, and that's based on return on investment. That's prudent, so we can keep the pension promise to Alberta's public service workers, because if you do not sustain the viability of the program, then it won't be there for anyone. As you have fewer people paying and more people drawing, it's more and more difficult to sustain that promise unless you assure sustainability. That's what this government is doing.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, targeted is right. They have targeted front-line workers with Bill 45, Bill 46, and these pension reforms.

This PC government's right-wing, antiworker ideology blinds it to certain basic facts. We've already covered a couple, and here's one more. Gutting public-sector pensions will make it more difficult to attract and retain workers, which means the government will be forced eventually to pay more in wages and salaries. Premier, precisely how much more will it cost to attract and retain public-sector workers who no longer find it appealing to work for your right-wing Conservative government? Have you done the math on this?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the premise, again, is wrong, so there's no answer to his question because you can't answer a hypothetical that's based on a wrong assumption. But this is the reality, that it's always been there for public-sector workers to be paid fairly, to get good benefits, and to have a pension. The benefits and the pension are not there for all the people in the private sector, but it is there for all the people in the public sector, and that's why many people who have a passion for public service also want to join the public service, because there is security, there are pensions, and there are good benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the PC government continues its doublespeak on what their real plans are for Alberta's public-sector pensions. While publicly the Premier and the Finance minister proclaim that the government is protecting the defined benefit, behind closed doors pension bureaucrats admit that these changes essentially abolish defined benefit pensions for public-sector workers. My question is to the Premier. Don't you think that the 300,000 Albertans who depend on public-sector pensions deserve a little more honesty from your government about what you're actually trying to accomplish?

Mr. Hancock: What they deserve, Mr. Speaker, is a little bit more honesty and a little bit more comfort from that hon. member because it's very clear that the defined benefit pensions are here to stay. But the sustainability of those pensions is going to be enhanced by the modest changes that are being proposed by this government so that they will not only have the opportunity for those who are retired now to continue to draw the benefits they're drawing but for those who have retirement plans in the near term to understand that their pensions will not be reduced significantly

or at all. Those who have a longer term to plan will have that longer term to plan so that they can make up for the fact that the early retirement is not going to be as beneficial for them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that they'll have to work longer for pensions that pay less. This PC government is misleading Albertans. They claim they're maintaining a defined benefit plan, but if pension boards can't raise contribution rates to meet their obligations to their members, they can't possibly maintain a defined benefit. That's the bottom line, Premier. Why won't you stop this unnecessary attack on the modest pensions of Alberta's public employees and stop misleading Albertans about what you're up to?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely absurd that that hon. member would try and tell public-sector workers that their pensions are going to be less. Their pensions will be a factor of their best earning years, as they are now. That does not change. That will not change. That's the pension promise that we've made.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: are you cutting the cost-of-living increases built into the plans or not? Yes or no?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. What we're saying is that instead of being guaranteed at the cost of living, they will be targeted to the cost of living and paid at what the return on the investment is. That's what makes them sustainable. Those can be accumulated over time. That's a sustainable cost-of-living increase that goes into the pension benefit, but the base pension is based on your best five years or your best three years of service. That has not changed whatsoever, and people can be guaranteed that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Please curtail your preambles now to supplementals.

Let's start with Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 15 I was honoured to attend the missing and murdered aboriginal women round-table in Fort McMurray at the Nistawoyou friendship centre. In listening to their heart-wrenching stories, many expressed the sentiment that while stories about these women appear in the media initially, the files are then just thrown onto a pile of cases that go cold. They're not prepared to give up hope, and they're imploring that the federal and provincial governments do more. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: can you please give some specifics as to changes your department can make to ensure that cases are investigated thoroughly and not just forgotten?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Please forgive my voice today as I'm not feeling that well.

I'm happy to chat with the member offline, but it would be a hazard to indicate any specific actions dealing with investigations here as both investigations and prosecutions are fully independent of political authority. I do think, of course, Mr. Speaker, that on a

higher level this is a matter worth looking into, and I thank the member for bringing this up.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister: why is there no way to gather and measure information regarding these hateful crimes when it's easily determined that these missing women are aboriginal in descent?

Mr. Denis: I'm not aware, actually, that there is any type of system, other than the actual FOIP system or our statistics, that this member could use. Again, I would be happy to undertake to go and investigate in my department because, again, I do think that this is a very serious issue, with the number of missing aboriginal women that this member mentions.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the minister of aboriginal affairs: given that the government is committed to teaching students about the residential schools' impact, what else can you do to ensure that education extends beyond the terrible tragedies of yesterday and to the circumstances that are happening right now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his advocacy on this very, very important issue. He will know that we've struck in the last year two aboriginal women's security councils, a Métis council and a First Nations council. Both of those councils have identified the safety of aboriginal women as being of the utmost concern. We're working with them on that. The member is probably quite right; maybe there's an educational component here as well. We will continue to advocate on the national stage for missing and murdered aboriginal women. As I told the member the other day, we have advocated for an inquiry.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Unfortunately, the time has elapsed.

Let's move on to Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Lethbridge-East.

FOIP Request Process

(continued)

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November the former Deputy Premier issued a directive to this arrogant and out-of-touch PC cabinet. He told them to use their partisan political staff to vet all incoming FOIP requests that had the potential to generate "reputational issues for [this] government." To the Minister of Human Services: you were the Minister of Service Alberta at the time; you were in charge of maintaining the dignity and credibility of the FOIP process in Alberta. Why didn't you speak up the moment that you found out about this wrongdoing?

2:10

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there's no end to how far they will go. Cabinet ministers in any cabinet, I imagine, are expected to know what their departments are releasing so that they can answer to their constituents, to the opposition, and to the media when asked that day about a certain piece of information. This memo was written and first sent to the Privacy Commissioner for her approval. She read it, she approved it, and then subsequent to that,

it was sent to cabinet. Keep digging, but you're digging in the wrong place.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act guarantees that all Albertans, from private citizens to professional journalists, have the right to access public records, does the current Minister of Service Alberta believe that this ongoing practice of using partisan political staff to vet FOIP requests is or isn't illegal political interference?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The word "vet" is where the entire problem here is. There is nothing being vetted. All of the FOIP requests are following the process. They're all being released publicly. The simple request was that we could coordinate what they are so that all of cabinet could know and all of caucus could know what FOIP requests are coming out, just like we do with any other public announcement. But nothing about the data or the information was being vetted at all. It doesn't even say "vetted" in the memo. They can keep pushing that issue, but they're incorrect about it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we now know that this PC cabinet is improperly vetting FOIP requests if there are reputational issues with the government, will the Premier accept this blatant breach of legislation, or did he not know that this rotten practice was wrong at the time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I have a copy of what he's referring to right here, and there's nothing that says "vetting." All it discusses is gathering the FOIP requests so that they could be reviewed so that we'd know what was going out. Otherwise, they get publicly released, and we don't know what's going out, and then we get phone calls about it. There's nothing in here that mentions vetting. It's about gathering information so that everyone is aware of what's going out publicly. Nothing is being singled out or eliminated or affected by that process.

The Speaker: Thank you.

A point of order by the Minister of Justice was raised at 2:12:30.

We'll move on to Lethbridge-East, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Invasive Mussel Species

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is a force of nature that winds its way through bodies of water full of organisms that bring both nutrients and in some cases detriment. This brings me to the rising issue of infestation by quagga or zebra mussels. These freshwater mussels encompass objects and have been seen to be moving inward from the east coast of North America. Southern Alberta relies heavily on irrigation systems that could be directly affected by these mussels. My question is to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. What is the government doing to protect Alberta from this possible infestation, and is there a budget in the future?

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

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question and, actually, a real challenge to our waterways in Alberta. I can tell you that we developed an aquatic invasive species program, that looks at outreach and education, regular monitoring for invasive species, rapid response planning, watercraft inspections, and policy and legislation. We've put in place a boat inspection program, that's been initiated on our major highways coming into Alberta in an effort to stop any unintentional transport of the species, and it's also important that we work with our neighbouring jurisdictions – B.C., Saskatchewan, and Montana – to make sure that we intercept any boats that may be carrying the aquatic invasive species.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most of my questions were answered already in that very succinct answer, for which I'm grateful. I'd also like to know if perhaps the minister would speak more about how this infestation – I've been talking about southern Alberta – could affect other parts of the province.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's important to realize that we are estimating that this infestation could cost the province about \$75 million annually, so no small cost.

Mr. Speaker, also, high populations of mussels in other jurisdictions have led to ecosystem shifts that affect both commercial and recreational populations. They're linked to blue-green algae blooms and have significantly impacted infrastructure, irrigation, property values, and recreational activities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Could the minister explain if there are any initiatives under way to better educate the public about this threat, I guess, particularly at the border, when people are coming home from the south?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are launching an education campaign this summer promoting the clean, drain, and dry message. The campaign will help in recognition of the program while giving instructions about what actions boaters can take to prevent the spread of quagga or zebra mussels. We also have a hotline in place, which has been established for the public to call with questions. If someone calls about a mussel-infested vehicle or boat that they've seen, we have trained officials that can be there to clean those boats up.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PDD Supports Intensity Scale

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, last week the associate minister of PDD dodged questions on the supports intensity scale. Families and providers that work with SIS cannot understand why people with developmental disabilities must be asked questions that ask them to compare the assistance they require to that of regular people in order to assess the supports they receive. The associate minister has had all weekend to think about this and the effect of these demeaning questions. Will he respect Albertans and put an end to this line of questioning immediately?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to delivering the highest quality of services to all Albertans. SIS is just a tool which is used to measure and to do a baseline assessment of individuals so that we can deliver consistent services right across the province. In PDD we serve 10,700 people. Of that, 97 per cent of SIS assessments have been completed so that we can deliver consistent services right across the province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Towle: Clearly, the minister is not going to stand up for people with developmental disabilities.

The associate minister keeps saying that the supports intensity scale is only one tool used to determine funding. In practice this simply is not true. It is the only tool. Can the associate minister explain to Albertans, who are challenging your statements day after day, what other tools your ministry is using to determine funding in the PDD system? And geographic area is not a tool; it is a factor, Minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, SIS measures individuals in nine different themes and 85 different categories. The reason for doing that assessment is to measure their needs, their goals, their aspirations right across the province so that we can meet their needs. When it comes to funding, SIS is just one of the tools which is used to have a baseline assessment for consistent services. Their existing natural supports play a role. Geographical location plays a role. Most importantly, once again, their needs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, clearly, the associate minister does not understand that SIS is demeaning and humiliating and that 97 per cent of these people have had to go through a demeaning and humiliating process, and this associate minister has defended that process all the way along. What other tools does this government, this ministry, have to assess funding for people with developmental disabilities over and above SIS?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, before selecting SIS, we went through a rigorous process. There were a number of different options which were available. At the time we had community boards, and we had the CEOs of community boards. A number of different options were provided to them. This is an international tool used by 14 different countries. In terms of funding, as I stated in my previous answer, their natural supports play a role, their geographical location plays a role, and their needs, their goals, their aspirations are the centre of all of that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's go to Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first-quarter report of the Market Surveillance Administrator validates what Alberta Liberals have been saying all session, that economic withholding leads to higher energy prices, and it is tacitly endorsed, if not encouraged, by the Alberta electricity watchdog, our system operator, and the government itself. To the Minister of Energy: whatever happened to the government's lofty pledge that deregulation and competition would bring lower energy prices?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:20

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are seeing lower prices. In the last several months we've seen lower prices. January was higher, but February and March – in April, quite frankly, we've seen lower prices than we've seen in several months. The system is working.

The other part of that, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta's system, compared to other provinces, has no public debt.

Mr. Hehr: Up is down, east is west, and north is south.

Given that economic withholding is causing real hardship for Alberta families, the same families whose pension benefits this government is now threatening to claw back, when is this minister finally going to stand up to power producers and offer a solution to what is happening in our electricity market?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. We're doing many things. One thing, first and foremost, is that if customers are uncomfortable with the month-to-month fluctuations in prices, they can sign a contract, or if they want, they can go to a fixed monthly plan.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have an MLA team that is reviewing different scenarios to look at these very same things. We always think of the consumers first and foremost.

Mr. Hehr: Well, the solution she offers is part of the problem. When are we going to cut all the nonsense of having Albertans trying to figure out which contract is best for their electricity needs? Why are we asking Albertans to become energy contract experts? Why wouldn't we just go to one energy price for all residential consumers by having them pay something like the spot energy price averaged out over a 12-month period?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, consumers in Alberta can go to a month-to-month, or they can go to a fixed monthly plan. Over the last 10 years electricity prices in Alberta have been competitive with all provinces that do not have access to cheap hydro. We have a great system here in Alberta and, again, no public debt on our system here in Alberta.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Public Service Pensions

(continued)

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is also going after private-sector pensions and the workers who earn them. Employers said, "Jump," and this government begged, "How high?" They want to let private-sector employers gut defined benefits for their workers and replace them with a cross their fingers, cross their toes approach to scraping through their hard-earned retirement. To the Minister of Finance. Long-serving, hard-working Albertans want the defined benefits that they earned. Why are you stripping them of their retirement security?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the steps that we're taking are steps to actually protect the defined benefit pension plans that are in this province, both private and public. I would also suggest to the hon. member

that she might want to look at what's going on outside of the borders of Alberta. She might want to take a look at some of the things that are happening to defined benefit plans where people did cross their fingers and hoped that things would be better in the future, where they hoped that the returns would be there. Those defined benefit plans are in crisis mode and are changing the planned benefits for those individuals. That's not what is happening in Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government thinks it's okay for the cabinet behind closed doors to set the rules for consulting workers before stripping those benefits from their retirement and given that this government's idea of consultation means that if they don't like what they're hearing, they flip over the table and write their own rules, to the Minister of Finance: why is it so hard for you to understand that Alberta's seniors need retirement security, not empty promises to consult from a broken-promises government?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, seniors who are retired on defined benefit plans today are protected under the program that we're putting forward. They will not lose any benefits. For these hon. members to even suggest that is only to raise fear in their minds, and that is deplorable. What we are doing is protecting future benefits, benefits of today, and those seniors who are on retirement benefits today. Unbelievable.

Ms Notley: What's unbelievable is that this minister will not admit that he is making changes that are going to cut the benefits that people get when they retire five years from now, 10 years from now. Just admit it.

Given that the minister says that he's bringing in changes because he's been asked to by employers and given that the changes will be made on the backs of individual retirees now or in the future living on fixed incomes, will the minister admit that yet again he and his entitled PC government are placing the interests of their entitled corporate friends over that of regular working Albertans once again?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, again, you know, it's funny. When I started this process almost two years ago, I was actually in the camp with the Wildrose. I thought defined contribution was the way to go. I've actually changed my tune on that one. Over the last two years I've looked at a way that we can actually defend and protect and preserve defined benefit programs for our employees in the four pension plans that we're the trustee of, and that is exactly what we're doing. We are defending defined benefit programs. I met with all of the union leaders last week. We're starting the contribution cap discussion this week. We'll be talking about joint sponsorship as we move forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, your point of order was noted at 2:22. Now let's recognize you for your question.

Planned Transmission Line Shutdown

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Electric System Operator announced last week that May was the best time to shut down the transmission line for 12 days so that ultimately it could do its work to connect a new HVDC transmission line. This decision jeopardizes the reliability of the system, and it's going to raise electricity prices by 30 to 40 per cent, costing consumers

millions of dollars. Why should consumers pay for this mismanagement and not AltaLink?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The prices for May have not yet been released, so at this point that is just mere speculation. If people want to make sure that they have prices that are the same from month to month, we have a plan, and we have a system in place for consumers to do that. As I said, the prices for the month of April are the lowest that we've seen in months.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, listen up. Listen up. Given that the new HVDC transmission line is not built and that it won't be built until 2015 and given that there are no wires to be connected to in May and that some of the towers have not been constructed, can the minister explain to hard-working Albertans why they will pay more in May to connect to a transmission line that does not exist and will not exist for another year?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, we make sure that as we're building out transmission for the entire province – and I believe it was that hon. member, who wasn't in the House at the time, who was going on and on about how we didn't need transmission. We have been making sure that we have a system that is effective, reliable, and affordable for Albertans. That is what we have been doing as a government, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Wilson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Calgary Shepard generating plant will be online and completed by 2015 and given that it will provide an increased stability to the system once it's energized, eliminating AltaLink's need to destabilize the system while they work, why can't AltaLink wait until the Shepard plant is energized to do their work and save Albertans millions of dollars in utility charges? What's the rush?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that when Albertans need to turn on the lights, we have the lights there for them to turn on, that the system is built. We believe in a competitive marketplace, unlike this member or members from the other two parties. It is our responsibility to make sure that we have affordable, accessible electricity for Albertans when they need it, and that is exactly what this government is doing.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Shaw, your point of order at 2:27:45 has been noted.

Let's move on to Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Flood-related Temporary Housing

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following last year's flood the government moved forward in building two temporary communities for Albertans that needed accommodation. Many of the people that signed up for temporary housing lost everything overnight. Since then the temporary community named Great Plains, in Calgary, has closed, and the community called Saddlebrook, just outside of High River, is still open. Great Plains was built to house about 700 residents, and its population only hit about a hundred people. Saddlebrook was built for a thousand

residents and was fully occupied last fall. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs tell us what the costs to taxpayers were for these temporary communities?

The Speaker: The associate minister responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, in the worst disaster we've seen in this country, a hundred thousand people were impacted, 15,000 homes were damaged, and 3,000 people asked us for temporary housing. This government moved very quickly and within 10 days had a plan to put temporary housing in place for these folks. The cost of this housing for these two communities was approximately \$87 million, and I believe it was money well spent for the families that had a place to live.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister and your department, for the hard work that was undertaken at the time. Will any of the costs from building and operating the Saddlebrook and Great Plains temporary communities be recovered from the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

2:30

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to take a minute to thank the federal government and the disaster relief program for working with us and, in fact, all of the private and public and not-for-profits that worked with us through this very difficult time. We believe that under the disaster relief program, we're going to see nearly all of this money returned to the taxpayers of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what is the status of the Highwood Junction, the third temporary community that is planned for High River?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, High River was extremely impacted by this event, and there are still many people out of their homes, some still living in temporary housing. Highwood Junction is a community that we're developing right in High River to help people with longer term housing. This is for people that have disabilities, for seniors that need to be close to their homes, for people that want to be in their own community while they're rebuilding their lives, or for larger families that need that kind of space. We're going to work with them. We'll build this community in High River and help those families get back into their community.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Firearm Collection during High River Flooding

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This very liberal Justice minister has done a good job ducking responsibility for his government's part in the High River gun grab. However, documents obtained through an access to information request show a yet to be identified minister had advance information

about plans to kick in doors and seize guns from private homes in the flood-ravaged town well before it happened. Minister, the truth has a way of coming out. If any minister in this PC government had advance information about the High River gun grab, shouldn't it be you?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I thank this member for his question about the continuation of our common-sense conservative justice policies. As I've indicated before at our main estimates, I can only speak for myself, and I found out about this issue when I was visiting the RCMP detachment and saw many guns coming in. I immediately wrote a letter to the RCMP former commissioner, Dale McGowan, which I've already tabled here. That actually has triggered a full investigation. I'll let the RCMP complete that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we now know a minister from this incompetent PC government had advance information about the gun grab in High River, will the minister commit to an independent investigation to see which minister took actions against law-abiding gun owners in High River, or is that a stone he just doesn't want turned over?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, there already is an independent investigation going on, and that's with the RCMP Public Complaints Commission. That's not police investigating police; that actually is a fully independent body. I expect that probably sometime in June, but that's in their hands. I will make it public to this Assembly when I get it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Justice minister said that there was no direction from his government to do this, does he understand that if the minister named in this document turns out to be him, Albertans will know with certainty that he was the one that ordered the gun seizures and that his Trudeau-inspired and PC-endorsed liberal agenda will be uncovered?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise on a point of order. I'd like to indicate that perhaps this member should be doing better research as an MLA and stop practising law as a criminal defence attorney.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Grain Rail Transportation Backlog

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Last year . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Leduc-Beaumont has the floor, and he's trying hard to be heard with it. Thank you.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year's crop yields were 30 per cent higher than normal. However, that entire crop won't be shipped till at best later this year due to issues with the rail lines. Considering that larger crops are becoming the norm, this problem is expected to continue. Our farmers will suffer and our customers will look to other sources for their products until the government of Canada and the rail companies understand the importance of our agricultural sector being able to deliver their products on time. To the minister of agriculture: what is your ministry doing in conjunction with the government of Canada to

push the rail companies to ensure that this backlog does not become a . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. This is a matter of great concern to us, and it's an issue, really, of national concern. We have been very aggressive on this issue, but as well industry partners and other provinces have also been very aggressive. We're very pleased that the federal government has now taken some steps. They've passed an order in council, which creates some quick action, but also they've now tabled some legislation which is taking some of the suggestions that we've made in terms of interswitching distances and keeping better track of data and whatnot.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Minister. I do appreciate those efforts so far, but are you exploring any other options for grain farmers to get their goods to market on time?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, we've been having a lot of discussions, and these are discussions, interestingly, that have been going on for, really, decades. We are pleased that we're seeing some action from the federal government now. There are conversations in the New West Partnership. We're going to be involved in a symposium next fall in Saskatchewan. Interestingly, this is not just about grain, though. This is about all commodities because the movement of all commodities is a matter of great concern to us right now.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: Mr. Minister, are you planning on providing any form of assistance to the farmers whose livelihoods are being impacted through no fault of their own?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of options already. The federal government has an advanced payment program where producers can get \$400,000 advances, and \$100,000 of that is interest free. As of April 1 we're into a new year, so that's another possibility. There are also other options. I would note that AgriInvest, which is a federally-provincially funded program, has some half-billion dollars that producers have in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Acute Health Care in Consort

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've asked six questions, given two member's statements, and presented a 1,000-person petition on the lack of acute-care beds in the community of Consort, and still nothing. Once again to the Minister of Health. It has been over three long years now that Consort has not had their acute-care beds and that this government has had the time to find a solution. Consort does not want to hear the PC pig Latin about mitigating circumstances. They want to know that these hospital beds will be returned to their community. Will they?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've also had the pleasure of answering these same questions multiple times for the hon. member, and the answer actually hasn't changed from the last time that he asked. We continue to have challenges in the community of Consort with respect to ensuring sufficient volume to allow us to provide services that are safe and also to allow us to attract the required health professionals to offer those services. The question is about meeting the needs of not just the citizens of Consort but the surrounding area, and we are doing that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As some members have said, this is question period, not answer period.

Given that the Minister of Health continues to speak in bureaucratese about factors and circumstances and he meets and consults without getting anything in done in over three years, will he please tell AHS that enough is enough and that he expects acute-care beds in Consort to be in operation as soon as possible?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that of all people, the hon. member would not want a situation where in the political sphere we were directing the delivery of programs and services at the local level. The question is a question for Alberta Health Services and their professionals to determine. The hon. member knows full well that there is a significant issue with respect to having sufficient volume in that hospital to allow it to deliver services safely and effectively and to attract the required health professionals. If and when we're in a situation where we have those conditions, I'm sure that AHS will restore the acute-care services.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'm rolling towards nine questions and no answers.

Given that this is a secretive government that does not share information with the public and does not keep its promises, will the Minister of Health once and for all break out of the PC government mold and show some leadership, follow through with your promises, and open the beds in Consort?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, leadership would be recognizing the fact that with 99 hospitals across the province, we have to ensure that all of the hospitals are attracting a sufficient volume of patients and health professionals to deliver services safely and effectively. A number of our smaller hospitals, including Consort, are facing these challenges. That is not to say that they do not deliver other community-based services that are very, very important to the community like public health and mental health. I appreciate that this hon. member would like the same hospital in his community that they had in 1970. The fact is that health care delivery has changed in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

2:40

Organ Donor Registry

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know that April 20 to 27 is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week. This week draws awareness to the need for organ and tissue donation across the country. That's why I was very pleased to learn about and attend this morning's launch of the Alberta organ and tissue donation registry, following on Bill 201, which I sponsored in

2011. My first question is to the Minister of Health. Can you, Minister, tell us how this online registry helps increase the number of organ donations in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his question. He was, in fact, a leader within our caucus in bringing forward a private member's bill a few years ago that raised awareness of this issue significantly. Today we have over 500 Albertans waiting for an organ transplant in our province. Many more are waiting for tissue transplants such as corneas or heart valves. This online registry, in short, will make it easier for Albertans to register their intention to donate, and it will support that decision-makers respect their wishes if and when they are in a position to be a donor.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you. To the same minister: what safeguards have been put in place to ensure people's personal information is well protected by this system?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've taken extensive measures to ensure that information provided in the registry is kept secure. The registry complies with all the requirements of the Health Information Act. The registry is maintained by my ministry, the Ministry of Health, in a secure environment. There are a number of checks and balances within the registry itself that require people to identify multiple pieces of personally identifying information in order to verify their own identity.

Mr. Sandhu: To the same minister again: this registry system is a good step, but what else is the government doing to help improve organ and tissue donor rates in Alberta?

Thank you.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. There is more to be done. The registry is an important step in making it easy for Albertans to register their intent to donate electronically. Later on this spring, when Albertans renew their drivers' licences and personal identification cards, they will be asked if they wish to register their intent at that time. Drivers' licences will contain a symbol designating that that individual has registered their intent to donate. Of course, later this year we will be establishing a separate organ and tissue donation agency for the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, today marks a significant birthday – well, aren't they all? – for the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. Please join me in congratulating him on his birthday.

Equally important, I had received several notes asking for a 30-second time out, so to speak, at the end of question period when we have members' statements with which we want to continue. Now I've received several notes saying: please discontinue the 30 seconds. So let's try that for a while. I'm at your service.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let's go on with Calgary-Glenmore for her private member's statement, followed by Sherwood Park.

Genetics Research

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 29 is the anniversary of one of the most important discoveries in the field of genetics, and an Alberta organization has been taking the lead in making it a day worth noting. In April 1953 it was determined that the double helix structure of DNA is the basic building block of what makes us who we are. Because of genetics ranchers can now do a simple test to gain insight into the genetic makeup of their livestock to help raise quality Alberta beef and to ensure the best dairy cows. In plants it is genetics that allows crops to thrive in Alberta's climate. With careful genetic selection and testing Alberta researchers have helped the canola and flax industry be more competitive.

Here in Alberta we are proud to have an outstanding industry leader. Genome Alberta was created in 2006 as a joint initiative by the government of Alberta and Genome Canada. It has led many successful research efforts and is a leader in Alberta's contributions to the field of genetics. On April 29 Genome Alberta along with the Let's Talk Science organization will mark DNA Day with its fourth annual day of online activities. Experts in the field of genetics have recorded videos answering questions, all to be released on that day. Also, there will be digital chat rooms with experts and a Google Hangout with Jay Ingram, a well-known science broadcaster based in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, since the double helix was discovered 61 years ago, the world has made significant progress in understanding genetics. The work that Genome Alberta is doing ensures that our province is at the forefront of international human research and innovation. Major research in the energy sector is also under way to help industry deal with corrosion issues and clean up tailings ponds.

An important day in the world of science is occurring on April 29, Mr. Speaker. I encourage all members along with all Albertans to recognize this day by going to letstalkdna.ca.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

GreenTRIP Funding

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday I was so pleased to welcome the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Seniors along with the Strathcona county mayor, Roxanne Carr, to Sherwood Park for the unveiling of the new Bethel transit terminal. The new transit centre will have parking for 1,200 vehicles and a passenger pickup and drop-off area in addition to the new bus station and loading area. It is all estimated to cost \$23 million. Our government is contributing \$13.6 million through the green transit incentives program.

Mayor Carr reported that the new transit centre is one of the largest in the capital region and that it will facilitate 5,000 passenger movements a day. She said, "This terminal allows our community to restructure its bus routes, improve inter-municipal and local transit services, and take cars off highways."

I understand GreenTRIP is funding transit programs in 15 municipalities so far, to a total of over \$1 billion. I also understand that the call for a second round of applications, for close to another billion dollars, just opened up. You may wish to ensure that your municipalities are aware of the availability of the GreenTRIP funding that covers transit vehicles, light rail transit

services as well as transit terminals. Applicants are required to contribute at least one-third of the cost of projects.

I am proud our government is helping Albertans access a wider range of sustainable and accessible transit alternatives for local and regional travel while cutting down on our carbon footprint.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Health Care Professionals

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that politicians want to talk about personal health issues. I recently underwent surgery, and I spent about a week in the hospital recovering. I feel it's important to mention the hard-working health care professionals, who truly deserve to be thanked.

Once you're in the system, Alberta health care is top notch. The quality of care I received in the operating room and during recovery was absolutely excellent. I saw doctors and nurses and health care aides doing everything they could do to make sure that not only I was safe and comfortable but also everyone else around me.

Mr. Speaker, the people taking care of me didn't know who I was or the job that I do. They had no idea I was the opposition Health critic. Quite frankly, they were too busy dealing with patients to give it much thought. Everywhere you looked, there were patients in bed. During my recovery one nurse suggested I take a walk, so I thought, "I'll go to the patient lounge," but, no, I couldn't do that because even the lounge was full of beds. Someone suggested they wouldn't be surprised if AHS started deploying bunk beds in the hospital to deal with the constant overcapacity.

Mr. Speaker, when we bring up issues of waste in the system, whether it's executive coaches, sole-sourced contracts, or image and reputation consultants, it's because the Wildrose believe these dollars should be going to where they actually need it, down to the front lines. When I came out of surgery, I was sick as a dog, and who was there for me holding the bucket? It certainly wasn't an AHS executive. When I needed to go to the washroom, who was there to help me up? It wasn't a bureaucrat. When I rang the call bell, who came rushing to my bedside to help? It wasn't a consultant. It was a hard-working front-line health professional: doctors, nurses, health care aides amongst them. They are the ones who are constantly holding the system together, and they are the ones who need to be thanked over and over again.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Wednesday, April 16, 2014. As chair of the committee I can advise the House that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Thanks.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition of just over 2,400 signatures from residents of Airdrie. It states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to recognize the need for 24-hour urgent health care services in Airdrie and work with community leaders and health professionals to provide the resources necessary for its prompt establishment.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Bill 11

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce and move first reading of Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014.

This legislation is another step in support of our plan to build a stronger child intervention system built on continuous improvements. It puts a renewed focus on quality assurance that will improve supports for vulnerable children. The legislation and consequential amendments enhance our continued emphasis on providing quality services in supporting and protecting Alberta's children, youth, and families.

Lifting the publication ban with this bill will allow families to speak publicly about a child receiving intervention services who has died. Our government believes that it is the basic right of each and every person to express grief publicly if they so choose. It's also their right to protect privacy in a period of tremendous sadness, Mr. Speaker. This decision is not one for government to be making. It's one for families to decide and for those closest to the children to decide what's in the best interests of children.

This bill also expands the Child and Youth Advocate's investigative powers to include young people whose intervention files have been closed for up to two years, which will put additional scrutiny on how we assess outcomes. The works and reports of the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance will also help increase public understanding and confidence in our system by having them be reported publicly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. These postcards were collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, clear evidence that this government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for well-funded postsecondary education.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else with a tabling?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, a couple of pieces that the Wildrose opposition doesn't want Albertans to know the truth about, stemming from this question period. My memo, addressed to the hon. Premier, which was also copied to Jill Clayton, information and privacy officer, and dated November 29, reads:

Of course, the intention is not to interfere in the timing or content of materials being released through the FOIP process, or to gather information about individuals filing requests. Rather, it is to ensure that ministers can provide informed comments to media and Opposition about materials in the public domain.

Also, the honourable office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's response, signed by Ms Jill Clayton, the commissioner, dated December 6, 2013, thanking me for engaging her in the process of putting this new system in place, advising me of a whole bunch of potential risks that could stem, and advising me on how to mitigate risks to make sure that our FOIP process is intact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I would wish to table the requisite number of copies of a memo that was referenced in her questions earlier. In the document it is quoted:

On November 29, 2013, the former Deputy Premier circulated a Memorandum to the Premier and Cabinet requesting that Ministers gather information about materials being released by their departments and that their press secretaries gather information about active FOIP requests which have the potential to generate media, session, political or other reputational issues for government. It was requested this information be sent to his office by noon Fridays in the template provided.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We are going to deal with points of order. The first point of order was raised by the Minister of Justice at approximately 2:12. Would you proceed with your citation for your point of order?

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), and (l), particularly but not limited to "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." In this particular case, this was in an exchange between the Minister of Service Alberta and the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but what made me rise on this particular matter is that I believe the member had indicated that the government was, quote, blatantly vetting FOIP requests. That was in the third exchange.

If you just look at what the definition of vet is, it is to appraise, verify, or to check accuracy. The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour – I hope I got that right – has tabled the document in question. If you look to the final paragraph, Mr. Speaker, it says that "the intention is not to interfere in the timing or content of materials being released through the FOIP process." He's already gone through it; I won't beat the dead horse. It doesn't say "vet." It doesn't say "check." It doesn't say "verify." It doesn't allude to any of that at all. The intention, obviously, is not to interfere as to the timing or content. To say that the government was actually trying to vet FOIP requests: the very document that that member references proves his allegation to be incorrect. All I would ask is

that the member please withdraw that particular comment and refrain from making that assertion in the future.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's certainly no point of order here. If you have the opportunity to review the Blues, as I'm sure you will, you'll see that in the answer to the very question that the Minister of Justice has risen on in his point of order, the Minister of Service Alberta suggests something along the lines that they're not vetting these FOIP requests, that they're simply reviewing them. You know, you can get into the semantics of the definition of those two words, but at the end of the day the majority of Albertans would understand that reviewing FOIP requests is very similar to vetting them. Therefore, I would suggest to you . . . [interjections] The predictable calls from the peanut gallery across the way, particularly those that I always hear from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that it's simply not a point of order, and I would ask you to rule accordingly. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I know they want to deal with semantics because any opportunity to slander anyone on camera is an opportunity that will be taken. You should know that in the memo to which the opposition is referring, they're purposely not reading the last paragraph of this particular memo, which advises the commissioner that the fact is that ministries are inundated with FOIPs from the media, from the general public, and from the opposition, and ministers, who are in charge of the ministry, ought to know what information is going out so that they can knowledgeably answer questions about it. When a camera is in their face or the opposition asks a question in question period, the minister, to be competent and deemed to be competent, needs to know what information comes out of that minister's department and be able to answer that information knowledgeably. As the head of a department, as the minister of a department one must know what is in the public domain.

What the opposition, Mr. Speaker, is purposely doing is that they're tabling a memo, but they will not read you the last paragraph. They (a) won't tell you that this is a memo asking for advice from the Privacy Commissioner – in order for the system to be intact, I think any minister is well served to ask for advice from the commissioner – and (b) they will purposely not read you the last paragraph of this memo, that explains exactly why we're doing what we're doing.

What they also will purposely not do, Mr. Speaker, is present the response from the Privacy Commissioner. If they have this memo, they obviously would have received the response from the Privacy Commissioner, which says, first of all: thank you for giving me the opportunity of participating in this; thank you for soliciting my advice; here is a list of potential risks that may stem from introducing this new process; this is how to mitigate them; again, thank you for staying in touch, and thank you for making me part of this process.

That, Mr. Speaker, they will not tell you because they're not in the business of letting Albertans know what truly happened. They're in the business of slinging mud and hoping that something sticks.

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you.

I want, first of all, the record to show that there was a request made to revert to introductions by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, and unfortunately it got caught up here, and I failed to recognize her. I apologize for that.

Are there others on the point of order? None.

Well, let's deal with this. I don't have the complete Blues on this matter either, but I have some, and I want to just review them with you very quickly. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills rose at approximately 2:11:49 and among other things said, "This PC cabinet is improperly vetting FOIP requests if there are reputational issues with the government," and then went on to say, "Will the Premier accept this blatant breach of legislation or did he not know that this rotten practice was wrong at the time?"

The Minister of Service Alberta then stood and said amongst other things the following.

I have a copy of what he's referring to right here, and there's nothing that says "vetting." All it discusses is gathering the FOIP requests so that they could be reviewed so that we'd know what was going out . . . and then we get phone calls about it. There's nothing in here that mentions vetting. It's about gathering information so that everyone is aware of what's going out publicly. Nothing is being singled out or eliminated or affected by that process.

Hon. members, a couple of points, very quickly, then we'll move on. First of all, I would remind you to please, if you wouldn't mind, take a look at *Beauchesne* 408(1)(c), 409 (3), and 410(13) as well as *House of Commons*, page 502, the last line. All of them talk about issues pertaining to question period, where you shouldn't ask questions that require an opinion or questions that require a legal answer or words to that effect. I don't have all of that just in front of me. But just review those, if you would, please.

I would look at this and say that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills did use some very stern if not harsh language in his questions, but that's what question period sometimes is all about. In response I think the Minister of Service Alberta did his best to clarify it. I think what we really have here is just a classic case of a dispute as to what the facts are surrounding this. No doubt there might be more that follows on it. But today I see no point of order here, so we're going to move on with a reminder that we shouldn't use points of order to prolong or initiate debate.

Let's move on, then – that closes that matter – to point of order 2. Point of order 2 was raised at approximately 2:22 p.m. by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. It was raised I think with respect to something to do with the Minister of Energy. Let's hear the citation for the point of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm citing 23(h), (i), (j), (k), and (l). The member twice – and it should be in the Blues; I don't have a copy – referenced that the public carries no debt with regard to the Alberta electric system. Now, we went over this in the estimates. The government can play with the words and with the definition of "debt" when it applies to generators, but when it applies to the system – I brought this up, and the minister clarified it in estimates – transmission lines carry debt, and that debt is passed directly on to consumers in the form of a charge called transmission charges. That has never changed. Transmission lines are heavily regulated. So to make a broad statement twice in this House that the system doesn't carry any debt, that Albertans don't

carry debt for the system would be inaccurate. We went down this road before.

I won't say that that is misleading, but the member should know or should have known the exact correctness of what was being said with regard to the entire system. To solve this, what I suggest is that the minister correct and rephrase her words, that there may be no debt, in her opinion, as it relates to generation but that the system carries debt.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. First off, thank you to whoever gave me these Halls to help me with my speech today.

The Minister of Energy talked about – I don't have the benefit of the Blues, Mr. Speaker – no public debt. She said that there is no public debt, and her reference was that we don't have any public utility debt. Within the context of that question-and-answer exchange I think that was a reasonable submission. We were talking about utilities, so it was easily assumed that she should have said: no public utility debt.

This member brought up 23(k), which refers to: "speaks disrespectfully of Her Majesty or of any other member of the Royal Family." I don't believe that the Minister of Energy undertook that at all.

The Speaker: Are there others? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you wish to supplement briefly? Very quickly.

Mr. Anglin: Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, the member brings up the issue of utilities. The fact is that a transmission line company is a utility. It carries a tremendous amount of debt, and that debt is passed along to Albertans, just as I stated earlier, in a direct charge. The consumers carry that debt.

I made the citation broad like the other member did, but it really pertains to (l), which I cited also. We can play games with that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, again two different versions, two different, perhaps, definitions, if you will, of what debt is or isn't and what the energy policy might or might not be. Some might see it this way, some might see it that way, but truly I don't see this as really a point of order, and we're going to stop it right there. Thank you for raising it just the same.

Let us conclude that matter there and move on to point of order 3, which was raised at 2:28. I believe it was Calgary-Shaw, again with reference to a discussion with the Minister of Energy.

Please proceed with a citation.

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll make this very quick. No need to extend this one. It's pretty straightforward. In response to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre the hon. Minister of Energy in one of her responses suggested that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre may not understand her answer because he may not have been here in the House at the time it was given. It is a long-standing tradition that the absence or presence of members not be referred to in debate. Look no further than 289(3). [interjections] I don't know what it is that they're talking about on the other side, but if we were to overlook this, I can assure you we would have quite a bit of talking to do about this issue.

So with 23(j), use of insulting language, or (l), offending the practice and precedents of the House, I would ask her to withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I again don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I believe the Minister of Energy indicated that the member was not in the House at that time, and her reference was that he was not elected prior to April 23, 2012, actually two years ago tomorrow. Her reference was to the fact that he was not elected at the time and, therefore, was not in the Legislature. I think this can be dealt with by the way of a point of clarification.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. members, that was my recollection of it as well. We can review the Blues to get more clarity and intent, but I thought that the hon. Minister of Energy also was referring to a time referred to as election time versus actual presence in the House. We all know that we do not and should not and must not refer to the presence or absence of members in the House, so we'll leave it at that. I hope the hon. members on the opposition side will accept the explanation. That is my interpretation of it. So that closes that matter. I don't have any Blues in front of me, by the way, on that point either. It's just too early.

That concludes that matter, and we'll move on to point of order 4, which was the Minister of Justice.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Orders 23(h), (i), (j), and (l). I've stated many times that I had no prior knowledge of the RCMP's gun storage or seizure or whatever you may call it. I've stated many times that I found out about it when I went to the RCMP detachment at the end of June, and then I sent a letter immediately the next day, on June 27, to Dale McGowan, the former deputy commissioner of the RCMP, subsequent to which there was an investigation triggered by the RCMP public complaints office.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've stated this almost for, I'd say, about nine different months. There is no evidence to the contrary. I recognize it is a serious offence for one to state in the House items that he or she knows are blatantly incorrect. I know this member is a trained lawyer. At the same time, he needs to stop making these types of intimations because there is no evidence to back up his particular claims and there's, in fact, evidence to the contrary. I would just ask that this member please withdraw those statements and refrain from making them in the future.

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

3:10

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would suggest that there is no point of order here. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills was simply asking the Minister of Justice if he knew about this, and therefore I don't believe that it's necessarily a point of order. I don't know that there were accusations involved. It was seeking clarification on the facts as the Justice minister knew them at the time.

Further to that, I would suggest that in the answer if anyone is guilty of a point of order here, it was the way in which the Justice minister insinuated that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills should stop practising criminal law based on the way he asked the question. This cuts both ways, and I would just simply suggest again: no point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, again, it's been an afternoon of clarification and dispute as to the facts and accepting two different versions of the same event and so on. I don't have the Blues. I'll review them, and if there's a need to, I'll get back to you with that, but for the moment we'll just leave that as a concluded matter now that there's been quite a sufficient airing of it and a clarification of what both sides feel about the matter.

That should take care of it unless there are any other points of order.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mr. Horner]

The Speaker: Are there any speakers to Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act? It's been moved and adjourned, and we're looking for a second speaker. It will be the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, indeed, an honour to rise and speak to Bill 9 and speak against Bill 9, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, as it is called. Along with Bill 45 and Bill 46, Bill 9 forms the unholy trinity of bills in this Assembly. You know, it really is amazing that you have a government that is trying to negotiate a good deal, a fair deal for taxpayers and a fair deal, obviously, for our public-sector workers. The strategy for doing so is to poison the well so badly that, really, there is no goodwill left right now between the government and our public-sector workers. So, of course, it follows that it then becomes somewhat difficult to enter into good-faith negotiations when one side completely mistrusts the other. That's exactly what has been the case here.

The PC government has failed to lead by example. In the midst of publicity around the obscene severance packages that their political staff is getting, they are ramming through public-sector pension changes. When the folks in the public sector see the stories of these ridiculous pensions and severance packages being handed out, they just shake their heads when the government then turns around and tries to nickel and dime their own pensions. It is extremely obtuse and tone-deaf of the government to do such a thing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear up front with regard to our statement on Bill 9 so that there's no misinterpretation of it. We have issued the following statement on Bill 9: the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act threatens existing public pension benefits for hard-working Albertans across the province.

As usual, the PC government's standard operating procedure on labour relations issues is that of bullying instead of good faith negotiations. Wildrose has long supported the view that contracts and agreements must be respected. That includes the pension [agreements] promised to current public sector workers and pensioners who chose their careers in the public sector based, at least in part, on the promise of the current public pension arrangement. Although we feel some reforms to the current system may be needed to ensure the long term sustainability of public pensions, we believe that any such changes need to be negotiated openly and respectfully with union leadership, and that [if there are] any substantial changes [they] should only be applied to workers who have yet to be hired, rather than those already employed or retired.

Wildrose is committed to repealing Bill 9 if elected in 2016, along with Bills 45 and 46 which also unjustly ignore the legal rights of our public sector employees.

We look forward to members of this House, hopefully, holding us to account on that statement in 2016, Mr. Speaker.

We couldn't agree more that Bill 9 is a bill that absolutely is not only unwarranted but is an affront to the good-faith negotiating process, especially given that we have bills 45 and 46 before the courts right now. To add Bill 9 onto the top of it is only going to poison things further.

Now, I want to be clear. We can look at different jurisdictions across the country. I look at, for example, Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan faced an issue with pension sustainability. Now, let's pretend that right now there is a pension sustainability problem, for the sake of argument. Let's pretend that the government's actuaries and numbers and calculations are correct and that we need to make changes to make the pension sustainable. If that's the case, one might argue that the best approach would have been to follow the Saskatchewan approach, when back in the '70s it was decided that they needed to make some alterations to the pension arrangement that worked for them to make public pensions more sustainable over the long term. So they did so.

It doesn't necessarily have to apply in Alberta, but in the Saskatchewan case they switched over to a defined contribution pension plan as opposed to a defined benefit pension plan. That was back, I believe, in 1977 that they did that. Now, when they did so, what they did is that they grandfathered it in. They said: "Look. Everybody who has already paid into the current pension system and everybody who is a current pensioner: we are not going to change the rules for those folks. We're not going to change the benefits. We're not going to change anything for them. What we are going to do is grandfather it so that new hires, new people that have not been hired yet, will be under the new defined contribution plan." They did that, and now they're here today and have a reasonably sustainable pension program there in Saskatchewan, far more sustainable than it was in the past.

Now, that solution worked for them. I want to make sure I'm clear that I'm not saying that it's necessary in Alberta's case to have a defined contribution plan. Like our friend over there, my friend the Treasury Board president, I must say that in past years, before knowing too much about the pension issue, I was a bit of a fan of defined contribution plans as well, and I've said so. I'm not sure if I've said so in this House. I might have. [interjection] No, not last week, I assure you.

But I've looked more into the reports that have come out about the sustainability of pensions, about some of the other options like pooled pension plans, which I wasn't aware of four or five years ago but am aware of today, with regard to changing the contribution rates, and so forth. There are other ways that the system can be fixed and the system can be changed rather than just switching to a defined contribution plan. Perhaps that worked for Saskatchewan, and perhaps that's something that one day might work in this jurisdiction. Perhaps not.

The point is the grandfather principle. If you're going to make changes, you've got to make sure that it doesn't apply to our current workforce, that has already made plans for their retirement, has already made plans for their career choice based largely upon the pension arrangement. As an example, when I was coming out of law school at the U of A, I had to make a decision about where I was going to practise law. One of the options was one of those big Calgary law firms, which I eventually did go to, Borden Ladner Gervais. Or you can do other things. You can go to a mid-size law firm, which pays a little bit less but maybe has a

little bit of flexibility with family and so forth, or you can go to the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton and practise law for them.

Now, the salaries at the city are much lower than what I could make at a larger firm. I made a decision to go with the larger firm at that time, but one of the things that the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton offered that I found very attractive, the same with Justice Canada and Alberta Justice, and did twig me a little bit was the chance that even though I would take a lower salary, I could have a pension plan that was generous but I thought fair compromise for the fact that I'd be making far less as a lawyer at those institutions. That was part of the thing that made me at least consider working in the municipal legal department or Alberta Justice or Justice Canada.

3:20

I decided to go another way, but a lot of folks, when they go and work for government, part of their plan is to say: "Look. You know what? I could make more in the private sector, I could make more in oil and gas, I could make more in many different areas, but I'm going to go into the public sector because (a) I love the job that's being offered there, and I want to do it, whether it's nursing or social work or whatever, and also there's a pension plan. So even though I'm giving up some income at the front end, I'm getting a little bit of secured income at the back end." That pension tool is used as a recruitment tool, especially in Alberta, where it's competitive for workers. When it comes to trying to get employees to come and work for different organizations, it's very competitive. It's hard for the employers to compete with one another in that regard. This is a tool that our public-sector institutions use to try to get the best talent possible.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The problem with this bill fundamentally is that it changes the deal. It breaks the contract. Does it tear up their pensions completely and throw them out the window? No, it doesn't do that. No one is saying it does, but it does alter the agreement. It alters the benefits for existing pensioners as well as workers who are nearing retirement and soon to be pensioners and for those that are just in the system. They have made career choices. They have made decisions based on this pension arrangement. They have made investment decisions based on it. In my view, we need to respect those decisions.

Will it cost the government a little bit more to respect those decisions and those contracts than it would if they made these changes? Yeah. Sure. But does it mean that there's going to be a sustainability problem in the short term with regard to our pension plans? I don't think so. I think we can make negotiated changes. We can look at contribution rates. We can look at the way that the pensions are managed. We can look at a lot of different issues and different ideas to make pensions more sustainable rather than changing the promised benefits to our public-sector workers.

There's also a lot of uncertainty with regard to what the exact problem is. I know that the minister of intergovernmental relations was quoted as saying that the current \$7.4 billion unfunded liability with regard to public pensions would be corrected in the next 10 to 12 years or so without major changes. He was saying that in the context of the public pensions. He didn't think, at that time anyway, that there was much of a liability problem. Other studies have put that more at roughly nine years. It depends on who you talk to, frankly. I've seen lots of different studies ranging from "It's a very serious problem" to "It's not really a big problem at all" to a whole bunch of stuff in the middle. The point is that the

government I don't think has made the case that the pensions right now are, in fact, unsustainable.

The George & Bell analysis, for example, predicted that the unfunded liability in Alberta will be eliminated in nine years under the current pension arrangements. George & Bell is an independent actuarial firm that has been used by agencies of government in the past for several initiatives.

Madam Speaker, the services that our public sector provides Albertans are obviously of critical importance, and we all agree with that. It is so important that our front lines feel valued, that they feel secure, that they don't feel the need to go to a different jurisdiction, that they're not feeling undue pressure so they can concentrate on their job and not have to worry about illegal strikes and negotiated this and legislated 45 and 46 and bills like Bill 9 and so forth.

I'm getting and I'm sure all of us are getting literally hundreds of e-mails on this. People are upset. These are front-line workers that are doing important work every day, and this has thrown them into a very unsettled state very unfairly and probably unnecessarily.

So I would ask that the government, before proceeding with this bill, table this bill and make sure that they have done proper consultation with the union leadership as well as all stakeholder groups. I think it's fair to ask, Madam Speaker, that we wait until after we know who the next Premier is going to be. It is, I think, very unfair for this decision to be made by this Assembly when we don't know what the head of the executive branch in the next couple of months is going to think about this, and I think that's wrong. I think that there's a debate that's going to happen over on that side of the House about who should lead their party and, therefore, because they're the governing party, obviously become the Premier, and during that debate it would be a good time to have a debate about these ideas. You know, we can chime in. I'm sure the other opposition parties will chime in, and I'm sure the candidates will chime in. We can have a good, fulsome discussion. Did I just use fulsome discussion? I did. Fulsome discussion. Kudos to the Member for Calgary-Elbow. I'm now using her vernacular.

Mr. Wilson: With respect.

Mr. Anderson: With respect.

Anyway, I think we should have that discussion, and only when the new Premier is chosen do we then proceed with this legislation, if at all. I think that that would be a much more democratic solution to this problem. When the leadership is held and that discussion happens, my guess is that there may be a change of heart in this regard. [interjection] Perhaps. It generally happens. It depends on how competitive it is. If it's a coronation, then maybe not. Who knows? They're having trouble finding candidates right now.

Madam Speaker, I hope that this will be tabled. I hope the government will respect our public-sector workers enough to realize that they have made serious life decisions based on the current pension arrangement and that if they're going to make any changes to the pension plan, those changes will be negotiated in good faith with the union leadership, with the public sector, and that if there are any substantial negotiated changes, those changes only apply to new hires, the folks that have not been hired yet. That would be the fair, the sensible, indeed I dare say, the moderate approach – the moderate approach – that the reasonable right over here believes in.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is, as always, an honour and a privilege to speak in this House to bills

although my comments in regard to this bill, Bill 9, really reflect on what, in my view, are not positives for the average worker in this province, the average person who has worked very hard for this government and for the people of Alberta over the course of the last number of years and, of course, those that will continue to do so going forward.

Essentially this bill, Bill 9, introduces substantial changes to public-sector pension plans, and I think it's important to highlight who the people are that the government is going after, who will have their lives irrevocably changed when this bill is passed. In the main, Madam Speaker, these are the people who keep our hospitals running, who work at the Alberta Cancer Board, who work at the Alberta College of Art and Design, who work at the city of Airdrie or the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton, public servants who are there doing work on a day-to-day basis ensuring that Albertans get the public services that they need to live a high-quality life in this province. We have a whole host of organizations: the Lloydminster hospital, Mackenzie Regional Waste Management Commission, Medicine Hat Catholic board of education. The list goes on. These are not some nameless, faceless people who we are affecting; it's the Albertans who work very hard on behalf of the citizenry to provide quality public services.

3:30

This bill, in concert with Bill 45 and Bill 46 from last session, in my view, constitutes an unprecedented attack on working people in this province, people who are working an honest day for an honest day's wages. Essentially, it ties into a whole host of ideas. I mean, what's in it for the average Albertan anyway? It ties into what all this prosperity in Alberta is about. It seems like we have a whole host of people in this province who are getting exceedingly wealthy as a result of our oil boom and our energy resource industry, and we have a whole host of people who are not supposed to be part of this, who are not supposed to be part of the good fortune of our living on 25 per cent of the world's resources. It appears that the government believes that people who work in our public services should not be entitled to some of the Alberta advantage of living on that resource wealth. It continues along with that theme.

We see that one of the major things that, in my view, is going to affect not only Alberta but probably the rest of the world over the course of the next 40 years is inequality. We continue to see a portion of our population throughout the world doing very well and other groups of individuals who are continuing not to do very well. There's a continuing gap between the wealthy and the poor not only throughout the world but in Alberta as well. This contributes to this and does not rectify it. It does not do anything to work towards solving that issue or having people understand that Alberta is a place for everyone.

If we look at this, what are the changes? We'll be talking a lot about this over the course of the next couple of weeks, and I'm glad for that. If you look at what this is for the average person who receives a pension, who works for one of Alberta's four major public-sector pension plans, the average retirement package that they're currently getting is in and around \$12,000. That's not large sum of money, Madam Speaker. We are looking at that as the average payout of pension benefits to people who have worked for this great province. We are not talking about egregious pensions. We are not talking about buyouts of AHS executives or people who have close ties to this government or the like. You know, we have had countless examples over the last number of years since I've been in this House of people receiving golden handshakes or gold-plated pensions. This is not an example like those individuals, and let's be clear about that.

Let's face it. Pension benefits are negotiated between a government and their employees. That's what they are. Simply put, the employees have contributed their wages to these pension plans. The government as the employer has contributed as well. So it's part of a negotiated contract settlement. Now, in the future when the government goes to negotiate these contracts and there's no longer a pension plan to offer to find quality workers to do the services that Albertans need, does the government just think that these workers are going to continue to work for exactly the same wage? Or do you think that maybe they might demand a higher average hourly wage? Do you think that might happen? I don't really know where the cost savings or the certainty is coming from in this. All I know is that it seems to be an attack on the average working man and woman in this province.

Here are some of the specific changes that the government is now proposing. They're proposing to move the retirement age from an 80 or 85 factor, depending on the plan, to a 60 and 90 factor. That means people will be working longer to obtain any pension that they would have otherwise received. There are also cost-of-living adjustments for pension benefits earned after 2015, and the cost-of-living adjustments for pension benefits earned up to 2016 will remain – oh, just wait. I'm rambling here, but I've got to get my place. If you look at how it is, as part of the pension reforms the government will transition all – well, what we're basically going to here, Madam Speaker, is that we will only have a COLA, which people will be entitled to on their retirement savings, to be paid out at 60 per cent of inflation.

But here's where the kicker is. It will be dependent upon whether or not the plan actually makes money or is doing well or not because the government is limiting the contribution rates. It is saying: look, we are going to limit the contribution rates of both employees and employers. This puts the beneficiaries, the people who are involved in the plan, in a very difficult place. If we run into a situation like we did in 2008, where the market crashes, where you have a fundamental breakdown of what is supposed to happen in our world economy, well, those pension plans will no longer be able to raise revenue from their workforce in order to keep pension benefits for those members who are still involved in the plan.

Having this happen will simply make the plan – in my view, it won't serve the purpose of getting people the funds they need when they are in retirement, which is essentially what they're designed to do. You know, if you look at the changes as indicated, the end result will be that the pension plan, in my view, will not be workable or sustainable or provide people who have retired, most likely in their senior years, with any guarantee of an income. How can they figure out what their monthly benefits will be? How can they be assured that they can pay their bills, assured that they can handle their basic living arrangements when they have no idea what their actual benefits will be in the future? I think it's specious at best to say that this new arrangement will provide any predictability or sustainability to pensions. That is the reason why they were first intended to be there for individuals, to allow them to have that certainty of limits.

We can go through a lot of this later on: the hard cap on contributions; the end of the 85 factor; the increased penalties for early retirement that are, in fact, egregious; a reduction or removal of the cost-of-living allowances for pension benefits; and long-term benefit reductions of a nature that, in my view, will make it very difficult for the average person who works for us in our public service to retire in any kind of dignity.

3:40

To sum up, Madam Speaker, in my view, a lot of the noise around this is politically driven. I think at one time the government was looking up ways to support its right-wing flank as they saw the Wildrose as their natural competition in the upcoming election. I think that has driven them to this type of extreme, where they've gone after pension benefits and they've done things like Bill 45 and Bill 46. In my view, it is not in our society's best interest to be going down this path. Basically, while these changes appear to be what the government thought at one time would be an election-winning strategy, I think that if we observe them in the cold light of day, they're not in the best interests of our citizens' long-term health, the long-term sustainability of our workforce here in Alberta, an ability to have some equality in our society, some recognition that Alberta is a place for everyone, including our public service workers, and trying to eliminate some of the inequality that is out there.

Really, I don't know whether the government at the end of the day is going to get very far ahead economically. I think they're going to be better off – well, if you don't have people on pensions when they're retired, what's going to happen? Well, one has to look at, you know, the relatively low contribution rates we have for RRSPs and other things like that and understand then that the government eventually has to carry the can anyway, whether it's through government-assisted housing or through benefits of some kind to try and keep people's lights and heat on.

In any event, Madam Speaker, I think that the much more humane way to do this, the much more sane way to do this is to recognize that pensions work and to provide people with a reasonable place to work at a reasonable wage and allow for people to live in retirement in a reasonable fashion.

I would submit that the government should revisit this after they get a new leader because I know that what I've watched previously with PC leaderships is that they've all denied everything that happened in the past and have tried to run away from it as quickly as they can. This may in fact be the case in this case: it wasn't me; it was her. That may actually happen, Madam Speaker. I've seen it happen before. Actually, I saw the hon. minister of Treasury Board, last time he ran for leader, say a lot of that stuff: "No, no, no. That was that guy, not me. Not me." I saw that. I read your platform. It was different.

Anyway, there you go.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who wish to comment or question the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise and speak to Bill 9. In what may come as a shock to many of the members, I am adamantly opposed to this bill and everything in it, so I'm going to go through as concisely as possible the issues that I have with Bill 9. I mean, this is an unprecedented attack on our public-sector workers. In fact, it may not be unprecedented because bills 45 and 46 started that attack, and this is just a continuation of it.

Madam Speaker, it's important to note, first of all, that this bill has far-reaching consequences, which I'm going to go through, but as far as oversight of the pension plans there's as well the shifting of risk, that is shared by the members and the government. This bill is essentially shifting all of the risk, the responsibility onto the very workers who have spent their lives contributing to these plans.

I'd like to begin there, Madam Speaker. You know, many of the members of this House may not understand or recognize that the concept of pensions fits under an employee's remuneration. It is part of their salary. They are choosing to accept a lesser salary today in order to have a pension and be able to collect a salary once they retire. The public-sector pensions as they are were negotiated in good faith between the workers and their representatives, our union leaders, and the government and had worked and have worked for decades.

It's quite frustrating that the government continues to use this rhetoric of: they're unsustainable, and we need to make these changes. The reality is that they are sustainable, and there are ways and methods within the plan to accommodate a downturn in the economy. For example, after the downturn in 2008 employees increased their contributions in order to bridge that gap in the unfunded liability. Now, what's frustrating and simply untrue is when the government says: well, the unfunded liability is too large, and we won't get it paid off. The fact of the matter is that there have been different figures batted around. I'll ballpark it that within 10 years the unfunded portion of the pension liability will in fact be covered, Madam Speaker.

I think it's interesting to note as well that Alberta is the fastest growing and has, I believe, the most young people of any province in the country, so the concern that there are not enough younger workers, younger generation, coming in simply is not true in this province.

The other thing about these plans. Part of the reason that the Alberta NDP is completely opposed to this bill and to Bill 10 is that this is an ideological attack. This is set out by this PC government to attack the very workers who make this province function every day. We're talking about the front-line workers, that this government will praise in one breath yet put a wage freeze on them, claw back their benefits, and look at making life much more difficult for our friends when they're retiring.

You know, one thing that's going to happen with this bill is that it's going to make public-sector jobs less attractive. This is one of the ways that we attract and retain quality workers when we're looking at comparing to the private sector. The private sector often pays more, as the Member for Airdrie had talked about, that before he got into politics, the private sector had offered a larger paycheque. But where the public sector can counter that is, again, in looking at benefits – health benefits, dental benefits, life benefits – and also looking at retirement benefits, which is a way to attract and retain quality workers. By reducing those benefits and attacking the very plans that workers have been paying into for many, many years, many of them for their whole lives, first of all it's going to weaken the pool of public-sector workers because they'll be driven out and more attracted to jobs in the private sector that can pay much more.

The other thing about this plan and the pension plans as they currently stand and why they are sustainable and cost-efficient is that risks are shared equally and over long periods of time. When these plans were set up, there was a recognition that there will be downturns in the market, absolutely. There are provisions currently for that, as I've already said. Employees increase their contributions, which has been helping to pay down that unfunded liability.

3:50

You know, I honestly believe, Madam Speaker, that part of this government's intent is to attack pensions across the board; I mean, this and the private sector. This is the start, but they'll be going after pensions in general. Some say that it could be because of lobbying from companies and corporations that stand to profit off

people making individual decisions. You know, if they lose their money, then, hey, that's great. It works for some of the companies. Canada has the highest mutual-fund fees in the world, which is interesting to note, which does reduce the value and protectability of pension benefits.

Now, I'd like to just touch again on the fact that this bill is one way, one form of attack and method that this government is using to privatize our services. Again, make the public service less attractive for Albertans, and maybe more of them will not go into the public service, which will continue to weaken the system, which allows a nice little road for the government to continue its agenda of privatization.

You know, the frustration is that we should be looking at ways to expand our pensions, and in fact the Alberta NDP has been a strong advocate of expanding CPP. All working Albertans should have access to a pension. Instead of bringing everyone up, this government is choosing to remind us that many Albertans don't have a pension and that therefore we should just take it away from all of them, which is quite absurd.

For us, the answer is not taking away defined benefit plans from nurses, firefighters, front-line workers, who have been paying into it and counting on it for years. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that my office has received hundreds of letters, e-mails, and phone calls from irate Albertans. You know, they're asking me: how dare they threaten or touch my pension, which I've been contributing to my whole life? In fact, these decisions are being made unilaterally. They're not being made in consultation.

You know, Madam Speaker, if there is one word that this government does disservice to more than any other, it is the term "consultation." Previously the board's recommendation was required for fundamental changes. Within this new piece of legislation that's gone. All the powers are being shifted to the minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

This bill reduces the required input of the board to simply consultation. The minister no longer needs the recommendations of the board to change any of the plan's benefits, and the board simply acts as an adviser. Basically, the minister is saying that he has the expertise, not the board, and can make these unilateral decisions.

You know, there's as well a clause applying to all changes to the plan rules that flow from this bill, deeming consultations done prior to this bill as sufficient for meeting the already watered-down requirements for the board members' input. This gives us an idea of the government's concept of consultation, which, by the way, as usual, is not defined anywhere in this piece of legislation. There are no guidelines, no guarantees for what is adequate or acceptable consultation when we're dealing with the retirement security of over 300,000 Albertan families.

You know, I could go on. When we look at how this government fails to consult, we need to look no further than to many of the aboriginal consultations, including the ironically titled Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act, on which they were not consulted on a levy that affects them even though it's in the title of the bill. Again, Treaty 8 was shocked and dismayed. Treaty 6 was surprised. They hadn't been told the legislation was coming. Again, this government often references information travelling one way and terms that consultation. Sadly, that couldn't be further from the truth.

Now, some of the major issues of this bill are, basically, the attack on different areas: changing the age requirement and basically forcing Alberta workers to work longer and, again, to receive less than they're currently entitled to; the attack on the cost-of-living adjustment. I do want to point out that Alberta has the highest rate of inflation of any province in the country. I'm

just trying to find my one number here because it's quite surprising what it's up to. In March Alberta's inflation rate surged to 3.9 per cent, the highest jump in five years and more than double the national rate of 1.5.

With the cost-of-living adjustment taken out, this is a serious attack on the value of the pension to ensure that dollars in the pension plan retain their purchasing power as opposed to losing money every year. Moving to a targeted COLA, I think, is simply ridiculous from the fact, Madam Speaker, that year after year that could remain zero or very, very low, in which case seniors or retirees would be losing money. So with all the money that they've put in over their lifespan and working in the public service, they're now losing money because of the changes to the cost-of-living adjustments.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, is the contribution cap and the fact that by imposing a contribution cap, the PC government has essentially handcuffed the board and all of its members from finding solutions in the future. You know, should another market downturn occur, you've basically stifled any options that would preserve the defined benefits. Now, at the other end of the equation the government will say: well, the only thing we can do, then, is to lower the benefits.

Madam Speaker, again, this is an unnecessary attack on pensions, on public-sector workers, on over 300,000 Alberta workers and their families. I can tell you that the Alberta NDP will be fighting bills 9 and 10 tooth and nail and is asking the government to shake its head and get rid of this piece of legislation and send it back to the drawing board. This is unnecessary.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who wish to comment or to question the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 9. The Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, is yet another example of the government's structural failures. The minister has tried to position himself as a good steward of public pensions and public-sector workers whose aim is to prevent unfunded pension liability for taxpayers, but nothing could be further from the truth.

This bill serves as yet another slap in the face to front-line workers in our province, escalating the labour relations problems caused by bills 45 and 46. While political staffers are receiving costly severances from the revolving doors of the Premier's office, they are ramming through public-sector pension changes. They expect public employees to take one for the team while they are lavishly spending on their personal staff, sky palaces, and jet-setting trips across the globe. I have heard from many, many of my constituents who are outraged by the lack of respect they're showing for the front-line workers. While they claim to be defending the public pension plan and the promises that they have made, it is clear that they are using this as a means to undercut public servants and blame them for their own government's lack of foresight.

4:00

Madam Speaker, there seems to be a lot of doublespeak around this issue: the minister on one hand saying that there's not a serious crisis, and on the other he's claiming that the unions are undermining the seriousness. The government hasn't done a

decent job of explaining what the real problem is. The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations said himself that the \$7.4 billion unfunded liability would be corrected in the next 12 years without major changes whereas another study puts it at more like nine years. So why are they putting 300,000 workers' benefits at risk when this government isn't clear on their own numbers?

The Wildrose recognizes the strain public-sector pensions can put on public finances, but we would negotiate. For a government that is seemingly always engaged in conversations, they clearly do not listen. Legislating wages and silencing in those bills 45 and 46 have made that loud and clear. Even if some changes are needed, we believe that any such changes need to be negotiated openly and respectfully with the union leadership. Furthermore, I believe that any changes need to apply to new hires only going forward. The government has promised that current retired pensioners are safe; however, only time will tell, and actions speak louder than words.

I have spoken with many constituents on this issue, and they are worried. They are worried about the power the minister will retain through regulating caps. They are worried that the rules will be in the defined contribution regime, and they cannot trust this government.

I will not be supporting Bill 9, and I hope others do the same.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll move to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I'm glad I've got the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 9, which is the first of the one-two pension punch from this government. Bill 9 is affecting public-sector pension plans. Just for anybody that's going, "What is a public-sector pension plan?" well, our world divides itself into two pieces. One is the private sector, which is business, and the other is the public sector, which is any form of public administration, so government, hospitals, education, municipal government and administrators, libraries. All the not-for-profits would fall under that sector because they are not driven by a profit motive. So it divides itself that way. One group is out there to sell their product or service to as many people for as much money as possible. Fair enough. We are very happy to have them do that, and hopefully most of them are really good at it.

The other side tries to provide a program or a service, and they do it for the most part very responsibly. Any surplus that they have, so when they take away the money they made from what they spent, if there's money left over, is a surplus, and they reinvest that into the product or the service that they are dealing with. So it gets reinvested into health care, for example, or reinvested into seniors' care. It doesn't go into a shareholder's pocket. In health care I would sure hope that it doesn't.

Here we have the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014. Now, I just want to talk a little bit about the history of pension plans. Typically these were annuities, and they still are. The idea was that they're not for a specified period of time. A pension doesn't say: okay; this is for 10 years. It says: this is what you're going to get upon your retirement – it's always based upon retirement – every year until you die.

Some of them have survivor benefits, where you can agree at the very beginning that – well, I'll speak for myself. With my parents, they were teachers, so they could agree that they would take a smaller amount all the way along, but then there would be a

survivor benefit for the spouse after their death. Both my parents worked. They each had their own pensions. They didn't take that option, but it was certainly available to them. It's meant to be a payment, a revenue, that is going to pay your living expenses for the rest of your life. Okay. We're clear on that one.

Where did this come from? Is this just a newfangled thing? Well, actually, according to my research the original pensions were for the surviving spouse. They were for widows of – you've got to love this – ministers, people in the church, so that when the local minister died, their spouse would be looked after with a pension. That was established in 1645 and 1662, so it's not as though this is a newfangled thing. This has been around for a long time, with the concept that it's going to last until the recipient dies.

Now, Bismarck really was quite an amazing administrator. Otto von Bismarck established pensions in Germany in 1889. In Ireland the clans or the kins were expected to look after each other, and they did that by purchasing annuities, for example, which would pay out a certain amount of money for the life of the recipients.

The English system was based more on poverty, coming out of the poor laws and the relief of distress. Theirs was more a sort of social-based state allowance for people who were in distress. They were in poverty. Smart move. Ours tends to be sort of a flow-through from that one. We do have state-sponsored ones like the Canada – oh, no. That's not exactly true. Old age security and guaranteed income supplement. Canada pension plan: remember, the employees are also contributing to it, so it's not just an assistance program; the individual is also contributing to it and, of course, to the pension plans like we're talking about amending with Bill 9.

What's the deal with the timing of this? We've got a government that says, "Well, okay. I'm thinking about this," in a budget speech a year ago. Then it rolls around to September, and they go: "Okay. Here, I'm releasing this, and I need you to have your responses back in less than four months." Then we get into this spring, and here we are – tah-dah – and we need to pass this pronto. Well, okay. And it would take effect when? Eighteen months from now. Yikes. Okay, well, hmm. That's not a lot of planning time, especially if people are going to be having reduced pensions or reduced parts of that benefit package.

I'm very curious about this because CPP has got more than a 10-year lead-in. I'm one of the happy campers that is in the first group that will have a delayed kick-in for CPP. Just, you know, a little kind of funny aside here. My partner, who is exactly six months older than me, got in under the line because he was born in a different year. So he will be eligible for his CPP when he is 65. This girl: 66 or 68. The point is that they've given me a decade to figure this out and to work it into my retirement plans. They didn't give me 18 months. They've given 10 years for me to work this into how I'm going to figure out my retirement plans.

I don't understand what the rush is, and I also don't understand how the government expects people to be able to deal with a complete change in their retirement income in 18 months. I know I couldn't. I wonder how many people in here could. I think it's terribly unfair, and the timing is deplorable. I think it's just about a rush in getting it through before there's actually an election.

Perhaps someone could assist the Member for Edmonton-McClung. He seems to be having a hard time of it this afternoon.

I would suggest that one of the things the government – no. Actually, I really don't like this bill, and I think there's not much to recommend it. Really, what I'm going through is the list of all the reasons why I really don't recommend it. But I'm just making a few helpful suggestions to the government if they wanted to try

to do it better. I suspect not. I suspect that that isn't what they're all about at all.

Well, my goodness, he is certainly enjoying his afternoon siesta.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: Relevance, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I just couldn't be more interested.

Let me talk about poverty, talk about the history of pensions, the timing of this pension, poverty. Why would the government take a dual contribution scheme, especially when we know that there are already a number of seniors who are in poverty, and add more seniors into poverty with this reduced pension scheme? Poverty costs a lot of money, so why is this government going to cost themselves and the individuals a lot of money? That's what's going to happen here. This scheme may save the government a few dollars on one side or the other, but it is going to cost you a lot more when you have ill, destitute seniors.

As several of my colleagues have mentioned, we're not talking about pensions that are \$36,000 or \$50,000 or even \$24,000. The average pension in Alberta from the public-sector pensions: 12,000 bucks. Let me just remind you that AISH recipients, who we recognize – oh, I'm getting a real sad look from one of the ministers over there, so I'm sure he'll get up and correct me. They're from actuaries. I'm not going to question them. If he wants to – we give assistance benefits of a little over \$1,000 to people that we deem will never be able to participate fully in the workforce on a Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 4:30 basis. We offer them an assistance benefit of just a little over \$1,000. My goodness, we are now subjecting a group of seniors to an average salary that is below that rate.

That's how much we value our public-sector employees? That's how much we value firefighters and librarians, your administrative assistants, the security guards that look after us and our life and limb all the time? That's how much we value the people that work in our municipal governments in every little town, in every little county, that, you know, keep everything running? That amazing woman at the front desk that knows where everything is in the town hall: that's how much we value her, less than we give as a benefit to AISH recipients? Seriously? That's pretty bad.

Mr. Bilous: It's pathetic.

Ms Blakeman: It's pathetic.

We know from looking at the statistics that we have a widening gap between the rich and the poor in North America. Widening. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle income are sliding into poverty. We're going to accentuate that by now giving them a reduced pension. What did I say at the start of this? Poverty costs money. And what are we planning on doing? Putting more people into poverty. I'm sorry, but you're going to have a hard time convincing me that this is a brilliant move. Actually, you're not going to convince me.

We also know that wages are not keeping pace. People are not getting increases in what they're making that allow them to have a better quality of life than they did 10 years ago. Also, for the first time we now have a generation that is not going to do better than their parents. Their quality of life, their standard of living, by any measurement you want to make, is going to be lower than that of their parents, which is supporting everything I've just been saying.

Who is this? I've talked a little bit about who is going to be affected by this. It really is anybody in municipal governance, in the health sector, advanced education. Remember that this is approximately 50 per cent of the workers in Alberta. It's a lot of

people, and it's the people that deliver those services that we so want to be there when we need them.

One of my colleagues was kind of going through a list of who would be affected by this, and I had seen the same list. It's kind of scary, actually, because it does go through every little town, every little county, you know? The town of Picture Butte. Whoever works in the Picture Butte town hall is going to be affected by this. The town of Elk Point. Anybody represent Elk Point here? Well, your person is going to be getting less of a pension here. How about the town of Didsbury? Anybody representing them? Or Castor? Or Beaverlodge?

How about the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation? The staff working there: that's whose pension you're fooling around with. How about the Red Deer Museum? Anybody represent that? I know somebody here does. Well, those people that work there, you're fooling around with their pension.

How about Olds College? I know somebody here represents that. Or the municipality of Jasper? Or the Kneehill Housing Corporation? Or the Health Quality Council of Alberta? I know that is a favourite one of yours. I cannot believe you would want them to have their pensions affected. Crowsnest Pass seniors' housing. Drumheller and District Solid Waste Management Association. That's important. How about the irrigation districts? Oh my goodness. People that work for irrigation districts. That's whose pensions you're fooling around with here. That's who you think isn't worth getting more money or getting a decent wage when they retire.

How about the Calgary Parking Authority? Ooh. I'll let you guys make the enemies out of those folks. Capital Power Corporation. The Calgary Convention Centre. The Badlands ambulance service. Hmm. That one's not going to go over so well, is it? You're affecting those people that provide those services that we all want.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would love to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre if she's aware of other groups that are going to be affected by these changes and if she'd like to further espouse her opposition to this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. There are pages of them. I mean, it's the staff that work at every single village, every single town, every single city, every single municipal district, every single country, every single library, all the irrigation districts, all of the regional boards, all of the waste management, anything that's offered by a municipality. I mean, this is a long, long, long list of people.

An Hon. Member: Flood workers.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yeah. Flood disaster recovery and flood mitigation people. All of those people that everybody couldn't wait to say enough good things about, those are the people whose pensions you guys want to reduce. That's who you want to affect here. That's who you're doing this to.

If it's okay with you, I just want to go back and pick up one little thing on the history. There are three groups that I forgot there. The other ones that followed on the Scottish clans were military pensions. That's the first time we really had pensions that recognized service, that service was given by those that were in

the military, particularly starting in North America with the Revolutionary War and then the Civil War in the U.S., and those people were granted pensions. Federal civil pensions were started in 1920, recognizing individuals who served in the federal civil service. In World War II we started what we would think of as the normal pension plan today, which was where you were paid less because they were really strained in those circumstances. You were paid less than what you wanted to get, for example, but you got retirement benefits. We've heard a lot of people here talking about the choices they made to take a lower paying salary in public service, but they were going to get the pension that made up for it.

What I'm beginning to see here is the breaking of a deal, that in a number of ways a deal has been struck for quite some time that the government is looking to tear apart: the timing of it, who's affected by it, the sort of balance of the pay that people are earning versus what they're getting through retirement. We really have pensions that were in place for an extended reward for services like the military, alleviation of poverty, and lower wages than people wanted to make or that employers could afford to pay them that were offset by the pensions.

4:20

I think the final thing, aside from who's being affected by this, is the fact that it's being imposed, not negotiated. Now, generally we negotiate with the people that work with us and for us rather than saying: this is what you're going to get. Everything is negotiated in the public service. You negotiate the different levels of pay and even the days off and the extra benefits that go with that. It's a long process. But this government doesn't seem to have any time to do that.

As I've said, we've got a process that's 18 months long, and it's going to pass right now – thank you very much – never mind 10 years to ease people into it, and they didn't get a choice to negotiate. I've heard the hon. President of Treasury Board say: oh, we consulted the board members of these pensions. Well, good on you. Not the recipients of the pensions; just the board members. Well, I don't think many of the people that are recipients are going to take that as a great consultation process, especially when they now find out they're going to get less money.

Let's talk about the add-ons. I find it really curious that the government talks about these add-ons. What's an add-on? Well, the cost-of-living increase: I don't think that's considered an add-on anymore. That might've been an add-on 20, 30, 40 years ago. It sure isn't nowadays. That can affect how much money you've got for a long period of time in a big way.

So the government is going to take away and legislate instead of negotiate. They're going to take away choice, take away transparency, and take away accountability. Wrong. Totally wrong.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Seeing as there's only seven seconds left in 29(2)(a) and I see no members wishing to ask any further questions, we'll move on.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak, actually, against Bill 9, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014. I find this an interesting bill to stand up and discuss. As the Health critic I'm busy enough dealing with health issues. I get, as I've told my colleagues, between 50 to 75 e-

mails a day on health alone. Then, all of a sudden, up pops Bill 9, which has increased the e-mails that I have been receiving from people within my constituency and, actually, people across the province that have become very frustrated from not getting any response from their MLAs when they contact their MLAs' offices to discuss their concerns about the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014. I guess as an MLA I always feel that we have to be accountable to our constituents. Even if we agree to disagree, it's important that you at least call them back. So we're logging and documenting all of the calls that we're taking from across the province, especially from Calgary, that they're not hearing from their own MLAs in regard to this bill.

I just wanted to get some things on the record. I know we talk in second reading of Bill 9 about the intent of the bill. It's quite interesting because it's a fairly large bill. It's 49 pages.

I just got a letter, actually – and it's a well-written letter – that's about seven pages. It's a letter to all MLAs, and its signatures are from Guy Smith, the president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees; Heather Smith, president, United Nurses of Alberta; Elisabeth Ballermann, the president of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta; Marle Roberts, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Alberta division; and, of course, Gil McGowan, the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour. It's dated April 16. They talk about:

As a Member of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, you are about to embark upon a debate that has huge implications for the life-savings and retirement security of 300,000 Albertans. Because most of these people have spouses and dependents, your decisions will actually affect at least 600,000 Albertans.

They talked about:

To put that . . . in perspective, [about] 1,290,000 Albertans voted in the last provincial election. So, the number of Albertans who have a personal stake in the outcome of your debate on changes to the Public Sector Pension Plan Act is huge.

You know, when you get that in perspective, that's a lot of people that are going to be in affected by a bill that's hit this floor, that's 49 pages.

What I like about the letter is the fact that they've put some pointed questions out that, I think, probably in committee will be the minister's responsibility to answer because I think it's important to refute questions that are put before the Legislature. We don't have a lot of time to read all of this into the record, but the first thing they said is:

You've been told by the Minister that Alberta's public-sector [pensions] . . . are struggling under the weight of large and growing unfunded liabilities. Specifically, the Minister says the unfunded liability for the four pension plans under review amounts to \$7.4 billion.

Then they go on to explain – and it's very interesting, and I'd just like to read this into the record if I may. It says:

It's true that unfunded liabilities in pensions around the world grew in the wake of the global recession. But, the unfunded liability in Alberta's pension plans is no longer \$7.4 billion – and it's not growing, it's shrinking.

I think it's incumbent upon the minister to answer that question because, in my mind, it's a great question.

According to a recent analysis conducted by the independent actuarial firm George & Bell (a company which has been used by agencies of the government), the unfunded liability in Alberta's two biggest pension plans, the LAPP . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to ask you if you have tabled that document.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sorry; I can't hear you. Just a sec. I've got to get wired up.

The Acting Speaker: Have you tabled that document?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, Madam. I'd be pleased to table that document.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Forsyth: Can I continue?

The Acting Speaker: Yeah. I think you have to go back a few sentences, though.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sorry. Just a minute.

Mr. Hale: You have to go back a couple of sentences.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sorry. That's why I have a service dog.

The Acting Speaker: Yes. Would you please just go back a few sentences?

Mrs. Forsyth: Absolutely. Sorry, Madam Speaker. I have to be wired up to hear you. I apologize.

According to a recent analysis conducted by the independent actuarial firm George & Bell (a company which has been used by agencies of the government), the unfunded liability in Alberta's two biggest pension plans, the LAPP and PSPP, has shrunk by about \$1 billion over the past year alone. George & Bell estimates that the unfunded liability will be gone entirely within nine years.

When unions pointed out that unfunded liabilities were shrinking, not growing, we were dismissed – even mocked – by the Minister. But, just a few days ago, PC MLA . . .

They say his name, and I believe it's the MLA for Red Deer-South.

. . . admitted to the Assembly that the unfunded liability would be gone in 12 years.

Then they use his name again, so I'll say that Red Deer-South's . . . comments were not a mistake – they reflect the projections of the Boards themselves, and can be confirmed by looking at their valuation reports.

We think that [Red Deer-South's] projection is too pessimistic, but at least he admits that the strategies to eliminate unfunded liabilities put in place years ago by Pension Boards, are working. Clearly, the Minister has not been entirely straight with you on the question of unfunded liabilities.

I don't know if I'm going to have a lot of time to read this into the record, and as you've asked, I will table it.

They talk about in sec. 2:

You've been told by the Minister that Alberta's public-sector pension plans are unsustainable in their current form because people are living longer.

They go on quite eloquently.

While it's true life-spans are increasing (and the last time we checked, that was a good thing) the reality is that all of Alberta's Pension Plan Boards have had strategies in place to deal with these trends – the same way they had strategies in place to pay down unfunded liabilities.

In fact, actuaries and pension experts now agree that the impact of changing trends in longevity on the long-term health of pension plans will be much smaller than previously feared.

4:30

The Boards of both of Alberta's largest pension plans, the LAPP and the PSPP, are set to release detailed updates on the health of their plans in June. Both reports are likely to show that

unfunded liabilities are shrinking and that...risks are manageable.

Why is the government in such a rush to pass legislation before this information is available? Could it be that they want this legislation passed before you, as an individual MLA, realize that the challenges being faced by pension plans are not nearly as serious as you've been led to believe?

They go on again in number 3. You know, I don't want to use all my time reading this into the record, so I think it's important that you've asked for it to be tabled. This is actually addressed to all MLAs. Every single MLA in this Legislature will be in receipt of this particular letter. It's dated April 16. I think it's important to read it. The third one is: "The Minister has told you that pension costs for public-sector employers are too high and that these costs are rising."

The letter is very, very well written, very articulate, and there are some serious questions that have to be answered, in my mind. It's a seven-page letter. I think it's incumbent upon each of us, every single MLA in this Legislature, to have the Finance minister answer these questions because then it sets out for us how we're going to be able to vote on this bill.

I can tell you that the conversations I've had over the long weekend, including driving up – that's three hours on the phone hands-free, I'll say – you know, are these poignant stories. I believe it was the opposition NDP that brought up the issue of the effects of these pensions on people who were planning their life. If their pension is even deducted, say, by \$300, that's a lot of money when you're on a fixed income.

I find that there are always two sides to every story. I think it's important when we're dealing with a significant bill to hear both sides of the story. I think it's important and it's interesting to watch. Right now we've been debating this bill for – I don't know – maybe an hour at this particular time, maybe an hour and a half. Gee, Madam Speaker, it's been opposition, opposition, and opposition again. We have not heard from one single government MLA on this issue, not one single government MLA. I could be wrong. Other than the Finance minister. I'm sorry. He introduced the bill, and he gave his speaking notes. He has colleagues all around him that can get up and speak with regard to this bill – I imagine they're going to speak in support of this bill – so that we can hear what they have to say.

I can't imagine in a million years that people are only calling the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek or the MLA for Medicine Hat. None of the other MLAs, whether it's Calgary-Cross or – Strathmore-Brooks, I know, is getting calls, because we sit beside each other. I think he said that he's received 120.

Mr. Hale: Thirty.

Mrs. Forsyth: A hundred and thirty. That's a lot of people contacting an individual MLA. That's more than I got as the Health critic. Wow. It's a lot for MLAs.

I have always judged in my political career whether I have an issue or not by the amount of calls that are coming into my office. It always sets my spidey senses off when I start getting calls. For the people that I have talked to, it's not a one-issue sort of thing like they're reading out of a song book. They're very articulate. They have some good questions, some that I can't answer, some like what I indicated earlier from the five different union representatives. They're representing, obviously, the employees that they represent in the individual unions. It's the individual calls that are coming in, passionate and concerned, about: what are you doing to my pension; what are you doing to my family? I think that not only the questions that are articulated in the letter that I started to read into the record – and I will table it, Madam

Speaker; it would be my pleasure – need to be answered by the government.

We know that this bill will pass. There's no question that this bill will be passed, and I expect at any time that we're going to have time allocation on it. That would be my gut. Maybe not. I could be wrong. We're here for another two days, and then we're on a break, and then we're back for another two weeks. We don't control that agenda. Hopefully, we can continue to debate this and we can continue to bring forward questions that we're hearing from constituents and, for that matter, Albertans.

Whether it's in second – I doubt if it'll be in second because we're talking about the intent, but in committee I'll make sure that the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance gets a copy of the letter. I know as a former minister of the Crown the amount of mail that you do get as a minister, so when we get one of the pages a copy, I will personally make sure that I send him over a copy of the letter so that he can read it and, hopefully, answer all of their questions. More of the questions you're going to hear probably in the debate in second, about the intent of the bill, will be answered when we get to the committee stage.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I did feel somewhat compelled to rise because I wanted to ask the hon. member a bit of a question. Just to confirm for her, I do indeed have the letter from the labour group and, in fact, have met with them and talked about the contribution cap discussions that we're about to embark on, the joint sponsorship discussions that we're about to embark on, which this bill actually allows to happen, something that, quite frankly, the unions have been asking for for some period of time in terms of the joint sponsorship.

The other thing that troubles me a little bit, which is why I wanted to ask the question of the hon. member, was that there seems to be a bit of a theme here amongst some of the opposition speakers around trying to tell people that their pension promise, their best five years or three years of their salaries over their life's career, is somehow going to be reduced after the passage of this bill. Madam Speaker, that's not true. The cost-of-living adjustments will be paid if the funds can afford to pay them. By virtue of the opposition's claims that there's nothing wrong, that there's going to be enough money there to pay for that, they shouldn't have a concern about that either because it's going to be there.

Certainly, the joint sponsorship, which will be responsible for that, will have the payers and the employees sitting at the table. They will be able to make that determination, which they should. Right now it's based on the trusteeship of the Ministry of Finance. I disagree with that. I think it should be in their hands, Madam Speaker, and that's what this bill is going to do.

I have to ask the hon. member if she has actually realized that the pension promise is not the add-ons, it's not the early retirement subsidy, it's not the cost-of-living adjustments that may or may not be able to be paid if the funds cannot be paid because the unfunded liability will rise if it cannot; it's the actual pension promise that they will get, the guaranteed amount, a percentage of their best five years' average salaries for the rest of their lives regardless of how much they put into it. I'm wondering if the hon. member has actually figured that out from what she has seen in the bill. If there's confusion there, I'd be more than happy to clear it up. Her party actually wants to get rid of defined benefit plans, so I'm having difficulty listening to the Wildrose Party talk about

protecting defined benefit plans when in their budget document they talk about getting rid of that.

The second question for the hon. member. When they talk about moving and cutting everybody off and changing it so that everybody new coming in doesn't have the defined benefit, I'm curious whether in her research she looked at the Alaska model, which did exactly what the Wildrose is asking to do, cut off all new entrants to the defined benefit plan and move everybody else to defined contribution. Is she aware that there is a \$12 billion unfunded liability that the Alaska government is now going to have to deal with because they have no new contributors to the defined benefit plan? I'm curious whether the hon. member has researched either of those two issues.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:40

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you. I'm pleased to stand up and respond to the minister. I guess, here's the problem, Minister. You know, I've known you for a long time. Albertans do not trust you anymore. They don't believe what you're saying. Unfortunately, that is an unfortunate fact of life.

Mr. Horner: I didn't resort to name-calling.

Mrs. Forsyth: I apologize. I was with you for 17 years, and that's the problem right now. When I was an MLA, from 1993 to 2010 . . .

Mr. Horner: I wasn't elected then.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, we were together. We might not have been together for 17 years.

The problem right now is that Albertans don't trust you. Obviously, the people that are writing this letter don't trust you either, and that goes back to bills 45 and 46. Yes, I'm aware of the ARIA, which is the alliance, the Alaskan legislators, and the comments that you've made at this particular time. The AUMA doesn't like your reforms. You know, it's just a fact of life.

What I would like you to do so that you can change the minds of not only myself – I can't speak for my party because, quite frankly, we believe in free votes – is to stand up and answer the questions on this. [interjection] You know, it's amazing how you get – they haven't got the guts to stand up and speak on a piece of legislation, but they can yell at you when you're standing up speaking. You know, it's just amazing to me.

If he answers the questions . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 9? The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to vote against Bill 9. The Alberta Liberals seek to build a strong economy and a strong society. In building a strong society, having a good public-sector pension plan is part of that promise. The Conservative government here has a pension promise. They do. They promise to cut the pensions of our public servants, who each and every day work hard to build this province. Public servants: those who 24 hours a day stay awake to guard us and protect us, whether they're on the street in police cars, fire trucks, ambulances, or in hospital departments. These are the good people who each and every day teach our children, care for our sick and elderly, clean our hospitals, and are the very public servants, the civil service, who advise all of us here.

I don't understand why the government would attack the very people that help them to do their job, who help this building run, the good men and women who have spent a lifetime serving this province and serving democracy, why they would go on an attack of their very benefits, that they have paid into for years. I can't understand why this government would change the rules more than halfway through the game for hundreds of thousands of hard-working men and women who have contributed to their own pension plans and contributed to building our province.

Madam Speaker, I know the Finance minister read a book and got all scared and got all panicked. He got all scared and panicked because he read a book. Yeah. *The Third Rail* it's called. He read a book by somebody from Ontario, and he panicked. It's bad enough that they actually attacked the public servants with bills 45 and 46, with unconstitutional bills that will fail a Charter challenge, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but they've gone above and beyond by attacking the very pensions that front-line workers have contributed to.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to talk just about certain facts. Alberta is actually a younger province. We're not a province that is aging. We're getting younger. We're one of the youngest provinces if not the youngest in the country. We have a baby boom. Albertans are having children, and many young families are moving here. That's a good thing. So the argument that we're an aging population does not hold any water in this province. We are not an aging population.

Ms Blakeman: Our average age is in the 30s, isn't it?

Dr. Sherman: Well, it's getting younger, hon. member. It's getting younger.

This is an argument that's been used by Republican-type Conservatives for years, whether it's to blame the seniors for health care – now they're blaming the seniors for our pension plan. The reality is that they are not to blame.

Now, you know, Madam Speaker, it's tax time. Every Canadian is going to pay when we file our taxes if we haven't done so already. We're going to be paying into the Canadian pension plan. There's a reason they brought pension plans into place. They brought them into place because people were retiring into poverty. We have the Canadian pension plan. We have private industry pension plans.

You know, my father worked in the mill, Weldwood, for 35 years. He was a good union man. In fact, I worked in the mill, Madam Speaker, and I've still got my union card from the International Woodworkers of America right here. There's something good about having collective labour bargaining rights. The reason a group of people bargain collectively is so that worker safety is protected, standards of work and standards of education and standards of training are protected, but also worker rights are protected. When collective bargaining units negotiate with government – we've had years of inflation in this province. Well, the leaders of our unions didn't take pay raises. At a time of inflation they said: you know, in lieu of pay raises we want to protect our pensions.

Now, they will say that the pension plan is unsustainable. As you know, the cowboys on Wall Street were fiddling with the market, and the market crashed. So there was this \$7.5 billion unfunded liability, and the leaders of the unions, working with government, said: "You know what? Our workers will increase their contributions if the employer, the government, increases their contribution." Now, they didn't take pay raises at a time of inflation, so essentially the employees, you know, directly and indirectly subsidized both sides of the pension.

That liability has come down from \$7.5 billion to \$6.4 billion. The Minister of IIR himself says that the pension plan is healthy. To me healthy means sustainable. The Finance minister says that it's unsustainable. The Minister of IIR says that this can be paid down in 12 years. Well, you know, the leaders of the unions say that at this rate this can be paid down in five years. The market is doing well, and contributions are up, and when the unfunded liability – maybe the truth is somewhere in the middle. It might be between five and 12 years. Even if it is 12 years – we'll go with you, Minister – this can be fully funded. When it's fully funded, the contributions for the employer and the employees are going to drop.

Employees have significantly increased their contributions, and in lieu of wage increases – they have not taken wage increases – they have said to the government: "Look, we won't take a wage increase. As long as you do your share, we'll get this unfunded liability paid up. We'll get caught up." So that argument doesn't hold any water. It's going to be fully funded in a few years, and contributions will drop.

Now, Madam Speaker, these pensions aren't lavish pensions that the government gives to its senior people, the SERPs, the supplementary pension plans that are, you know, \$5,000, \$10,000, \$22,000 a month, that they've been giving to some senior health execs. They're not the fancy management pension plans that they've given to their buddies. We're talking – I don't know – 1,200 bucks a month. [interjection] Somebody here disagrees with that. Maybe it's \$1,400. Even if it's \$1,500, how much is that? In today's economic climate what's 1,500 bucks a month? You've got to pay your rent. You've got to pay your bills. You've got to pay for food. You've got to pay room and board.

I'll tell you one thing. Seniors need to maintain their independence, to live in their own homes for as long as possible. We've got amongst the highest bills in the country – amongst the highest bills in the country – for gas and electricity. The cost of everything is going up, and these public servants, who built this province, need to have independence when it comes to driving their vehicles. While the cost of gas is really high, the cost of the vehicle is high. Essentially, by cutting the pensions, cutting the cost-of-living adjustment, our seniors are going to be retired into poverty. We already have so many seniors struggling with poverty today, as we speak, because many of them have lost their life savings. We know the effects of poverty on individuals, especially on seniors.

4:50

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Well, I'll give you some certain facts here. Poverty leads to poor health, and poor health, in turn, leads to even more poverty. You know, a study came out years ago in the Capital health region where poor men were dying seven years before high-income men. I'll tell you one thing. Before these poor men die before rich men, there's a lot of suffering that happens, a lot of visits to the hospital. Because of the paramedics and the nurses and the doctors in the health system, the health staff that do such a great job, we can actually say to people when they come into our hands that the costs to health care of dealing with poverty are absolutely immense.

The cost of poverty to the taxpayer for housing folks who can't afford to live in their homes is immense. Because seniors can't afford to live in their homes and there is such inadequate home care and long-term care today, we've put about 550 seniors in hospital beds, at 1,200 to 1,400 bucks a night, causing the whole

ER crisis. That alone costs a quarter billion dollars directly to health care.

To retire a whole new generation into poverty is bad economic policy. It's bad business. It's going to cost the taxpayer way more down the line in terms of money, but it's going to cost society in terms of human suffering as well. This decision is short sighted and it's ill conceived. The fact of the matter is that the pension plan is sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, here's another thing. People are living longer right now because they lived healthy lives 60, 70, 80, 90 years ago. The fact of the matter is that the next generation, the children of the current seniors, will not live to the same age as their parents. Their children are getting sicker even before then. Because of childhood obesity rates, inactivity, and processed food, we have a triple tsunami of illness coming down the pipeline. Okay? So the baby boomers and their kids will not live to the age of the octogenarians and the 100-year-olds that we have today. To those who are using that, these are incorrect facts that they're spelling out.

Now, they talk about targeted benefits. Well, my question to the government is: "What if the market doesn't do so well? Does that mean there's no cost-of-living adjustment whereas inflation continues?" That's exactly what that means.

Mr. Speaker, really, the most fundamental issues of our society are the issues of inequality, fairness, and justice, and that's what this issue is really about.

You know, really, these are Republican Party policies. I thought that these guys were the Tea Party, but even the Wildrose opposes this bill. Thank you, members, for opposing it. When the Wildrose opposes a bill – you know what? – the Conservative Party definitely should be passing this bill. It's really a policy of right wingers who talk about trickle-down economics. It's about trickle-down economics, and they have essentially doubled down on trickle-down economics, where if you give a few people a couple of billion dollars, they think that benefits will trickle down to the regular working folk. Well, I'll tell you that benefits don't trickle down; burdens trickle down. And this is one of those burdens.

Income disparity, Mr. Speaker, is one of the biggest issues facing our society today. In Alberta, the wealthiest place in the country, we have 90,000 children living in poverty. That's 90,000 children living in poverty. Well, here's a fact. Poor kids have poor moms and dads. You know what? Now you're going to give these poor kids poor grandmas and grandpas as well. We've got 90,000 kids in poverty, their parents are in poverty, and now you're going to retire their grandparents into poverty as well. Thank you very much.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

My mother is a widow. My mom is turning 75 this year, God bless her soul. Dad left us a few years ago. She doesn't get a heck of a lot of money from his pension. It's barely enough to pay the bills, you know. She doesn't have a fancy house. In fact, she's over the limit, where her teeth aren't covered. She goes to India to get her teeth done because the limits here are so low and she can't afford the \$5,000 bill. We pay for our mom's flight. Thank God Mom's kids did all right. We look after our mom.

Madam Speaker, not many families have children that have done very well in their lives, right? Many families have children. Remember that I talked about their children also being in poverty and their grandchildren being in poverty. With my mom and dad we got lucky that we had such good parents and we got lucky that education was cheap and we got lucky that we had a good public education system that was affordable. We all did okay as kids.

Madam Speaker, we are going to have tens of thousands of widows. This is going to affect the women in our society, not only the seniors, not only the men, but it's going to affect women and grandchildren.

I urge members of this government to vote against their own bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any other members who wish to question or make a comment to the leader of the Liberal opposition?

Seeing none, we'll move to the next speaker, the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill. It's been interesting. You know, I happened to be speaking this morning to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. One of the members before I got up and spoke asked where I thought this pension legislation was coming from. He said: "It certainly didn't come from us. We the business community didn't tell the government to go and attack their own employees' pension plans. It didn't come from us. Why are they doing this?" To be honest, I didn't have an answer. It certainly seemed to come a bit out of the blue.

We've taken a look at the government's numbers. We've looked at their rationale. We've looked at the changes they've made from what they originally proposed. We've also, of course, been working with the affected unions and going through their numbers and their analysis of what's happening here. We've also heard from hundreds and hundreds of people who are directly affected. The e-mails are coming in fast and furious every day. We've actually had a chance to really, I think, get a good handle on the positions of the various affected parties with respect to this, and it doesn't illuminate for me why the government is doing this.

It's pretty clear that the pension boards themselves, that include representation from the employers and the employees, have not sanctioned these changes, have not recommended the changes, and are firmly committed to the course of action that has been undertaken, which will, according to their work, eliminate the unfunded liabilities within nine years even if you do nothing. Again, it doesn't help explain in any way what the government is doing. I think that when you really press the government and the ministers on this, they will admit that ultimately without these changes that they're proposing, the plans will eventually get back to the point where they do not have an unfunded liability, which just leaves the reason that I think is lying behind this, that the government is trying to save some money.

5:00

The government doesn't like the temporary increases in the rates that they have to pay as an employer in order to get the plans back on track, and as a result of that, they are prepared to dilute the plans, to make them weaker. They're doing that in a number of ways. I think one of the most important ways is to make people work longer. So the 85 factor, which is the number of years you've paid into the plan plus your age, is changed to the 90 factor. It means that people will have to work two and a half, three years longer to qualify for the pension. That's the first thing.

There's also a COLA clause that applies. It has never been a hundred per cent of the cost-of-living increase, but it is being reduced. What that means is that the benefits that people receive over time will fall farther and farther behind the cost of living, and they'll do so at a faster rate than they do now. So the bottom line for employees under this government's plan is that in order to save

some money for itself, the government is making them work longer for a smaller pension, and that's just not fair, Madam Speaker. That's why we've been so strongly opposed to it.

If it was absolutely necessary, if the government could prove that it was necessary and that it would really save the plan, then I think they would have a case, but it's pretty clear that the pension boards have the matter under control, and the government is not acting out of necessity but out of a desire to save some money at the expense of pensions that are extremely modest. These are not rich pensions. People are earning, actually, very little under these plans. A reduction, as we indicated earlier last week, in the plan's payout benefits maybe amounts to a few hundred dollars a month, which is an enormous amount for people who are living on a fixed income.

For the government to try and save money at the expense of its own pensioners and the pensioners who work for cities and health care institutions and so on is just a very, very mean-spirited thing to do given the amount of waste that we've seen in the government, given the amount of subsidization of business, given the fact that the tax system heavily favours wealthy Albertans at the expense of middle-class Albertans. For the government to actually try and save money on the backs of pensioners I think is extremely mean-spirited, and I think that accounts for a lot of the negative reaction from the public, including from people who are not expecting to draw a local authorities pension plan or a public pension plan.

The other thing that the government isn't really telling us the truth about, in my opinion, is that this is to save the defined benefit nature of the pension plan. Now, they're quite right about the Wildrose position until recently being that we could no longer as a society sustain and support that kind of a plan, but the government isn't being honest about what it's doing. By putting a cap on contributions and hamstringing the boards, it may result in a position where they are unable to raise enough money to get the plans back on track should they run into difficulty. Normally they run into difficulty because the stock market runs into difficulty. This is invested money; it's not because they're mismanaged. If the pension boards can no longer get the plans back on track because of this cap, then they're going to have to reduce the benefits.

What the government is actually doing here is transforming defined benefit plans into targeted benefit plans. That means that should the plans run into difficulty – if the stock market is bad, if there's some reduction in the number of people who are working and paying into the plans that was unanticipated and so forth – they'll have to reduce the benefits that are going to be paid, and they'll have to change the benefits. So it's not under this plan, under this legislation, going to be a defined benefit plan anymore.

When the Minister of Finance stands up in this House day after day and asserts that they're trying to protect the defined benefit nature of the plan, he is some distance from the truth, I think you could say, Madam Speaker. It's something, I think, that people who are in these plans really do understand. They do get that, and they're very angry about it.

We have a situation, for example, in the United States. Some of these things have happened in other places, and I want to deal with a couple of states. The Minister of Finance has mentioned Alaska, and I'd like to come back to Alaska, but I'd also like to talk about Nebraska. Now, way back in 1964, Madam Speaker, Nebraska switched from a defined benefit system to a defined contribution plan for state and county government workers. The first thing that happened was that their administration costs went up. It required more record-keeping fees, investment management fees, educational

programs, and other administrative lines. In 1999 the state of Nebraska found that the expenses of its defined contribution plan were double the cost of its defined benefit system. It also found that when employees hired under the defined contribution plan managed their own investments, investment returns were lower than under a defined benefit system.

Now, there's lots of other information here, but ultimately what happened is that they took a hard look at the benefits that were being received under this plan by their retirees, and they found that participants in the state's defined benefit system with similar pay and service credit meanwhile had an annual retirement benefit of only \$16,797, which is \$3,100 more than the poverty level of a family of two. That was under the defined benefits system. So that's \$3,000 above. When they looked at what the defined contribution retirees with 30 years of service and an average annual salary of \$30,000 were getting, they had only about \$11,230 annually, which is \$2,460 less than the poverty line for a family of two. So, Madam Speaker, what they did in 2002 was that they went back to a defined benefit plan. I believe that this government will place many retirees at risk of living in poverty if it proceeds with this erosion and reduction of the plan.

Now, the Wildrose has a plan, and their plan – and I think I should deal with this a little bit as well – is to keep everybody on the plan now and grandfather them and continue to pay them a defined benefit plan and then to place all the new hires on a defined contribution plan, which is their philosophical preference. They've made that very clear over the years: in the last election, in their budget submissions, and so on.

5:10

I think the Minister of Finance raised the question of Alaska. We've also looked at what's happened in Alaska, and I think he's quite right. What happens if you do that, what the Wildrose is proposing, is that you no longer have new people paying into your defined benefit plan, but you are responsible to pay all of the retired people all of the benefits that they were guaranteed, so you get a deficit in the plan. You get a large, growing deficit because you don't have any new money coming in from employees to support the ones that have retired. People are living, you know, longer, so there's a huge liability there, which in Alaska's case has grown to \$12 billion. I think that is the actual figure. This year alone Alaska had to put in \$3 billion of public money just to keep the defined benefit plan afloat. Now, it's a good thing that they have a decent royalty system in Alaska, unlike you guys, because they can afford it, but I don't think we can afford it if you're going to keep all this corporate welfare stuff that you've got going on.

Is that one minute? Oh, my goodness.

I think, just to wrap up, that we should defeat this bill, and we need to maintain and support our existing pension plans and support the boards that are managing them. I think they're doing a good job, and I think the plans are solvent in the long run, and we need to avoid, as the Wildrose is suggesting, eliminating the defined benefit plan going forward for new employees because I think that would come close to bankrupting the province.

With all due respect, Madam Speaker, we think that the position that we've taken and that the Liberal Party caucus has taken is the correct one, and that is to stand up and fight for the pensions of public employees in this province, and we will continue to proudly do that.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Did you have a motion that you wanted to present?

Mr. Mason: Oh, yes. Thank you very much. Can I do that at the end of 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: We have 29(2)(a) in place. Are there any members who wish to question or make comments about the member's presentation?

Seeing none, we'll move on. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise here and speak to Bill 9, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014. Before I say anything, I think it is important to know that every single public-sector pension plan this province created was created by this PC government and was agreed to in good faith with public-sector unions. If there is a problem with these public-sector pensions, then the government should be approaching the unions, explaining why they believe they are no longer sustainable, and negotiating in good faith on any changes that they wish to make.

Still, this is a government that simply ignores doing the right thing. Instead, the government has brought forward changes they wish to mandate through legislation. These changes are not supported by workers or by the public-sector employees who work on the front lines, front-line Albertans who see this province misuse everyday resources.

Madam Speaker, let's talk about our public-sector employees. The government doesn't seem to want to have this discussion. First and foremost, they don't seem to want to make changes to their own benefits. One can only understand how it must be hard for our front-line people, who are providing fantastic service and fantastic care to everyday Albertans, to see that one of the first things this government did was to double the RRSP contribution they receive every single year. This amounted to approximately \$11,000 more every year, or an 8 per cent pay raise. In the case of even this past year that amount exceeded \$11,000. The perks don't stop there. We have ministers and potential leadership candidates that charge taxpayers \$10,000 for new office furniture. We have ministers that use government aircraft like it's their own personal airliner, even to fly them to PC Party fundraisers when they might need a lift.

It is almost embarrassing to say to our front-line staff, to say to 300,000 workers from over 54 unions: you must take it on the chin, but we're not going to set the example in this Legislature first. For that this government should really be embarrassed. Bill 9 says nothing about MLA pay raises, nothing about excessive government perks paid out from tax dollars, and nothing about using the government aircraft like a political party's airline. Instead, it involves taking away existing benefits from public-sector retirees.

I understand this is an uncomfortable conversation for many of the members on the other side. I understand you want to stop having a conversation about how we as Albertans and we as legislators are responsible for everyday taxpayer money and to everyday taxpayers. I get that that's uncomfortable. I get that when they were knocking on the doors in 2012, they didn't bang on a single door and tell them they were going to introduce bills 45 and 46 and then take away worker rights. They sure as heck didn't bang on any door and tell them that with Bill 9 they were going to do a full review and actually penalize everyday Albertans who are doing hard, hard work in the front lines. They also didn't tell them how they were going to abuse taxpayer money each and every day and then not answer for it in the House. I get that they don't want to talk about how they used the government plane to go to PC Party fundraisers, because that's uncomfortable.

Well, it's just as uncomfortable for everyday Albertans who are providing services to our seniors, to our vulnerable, to our disabled, cleaning our Legislature, applying all the services for our plant maintenance. They don't want to have those conversations with those Albertans when they tell them how this is going to negatively impact their everyday lives. Yeah, it's uncomfortable. But you cannot go and put this on the backs of front-line people when you haven't taken the step to actually set the example.

There's no question. Did we have to look at pension reform? Probably although the minister of intergovernmental relations would tell you that it was going to be solved in 12 years. The government keeps refuting that and saying that that isn't actually what he meant when he said that or that he meant something different. Well, the reason this pension plan is in this position – if it truly is in the dire straits that this government says that it is, then you should have been planning for that over the last 12 or 20 years. The fact that people age and they stay alive longer isn't their fault. You really couldn't see that one coming? You really couldn't see that people are going to age longer and that the people contributing were dwindling if that's the case? You had no plan?

You could have done these kinds of reforms graduated so that it didn't hurt them quite so much as they're doing right now, and you sure as heck could have done it while you were setting the example by cutting back on all the things that you're taking away from Alberta taxpayers. You sure as heck shouldn't have given yourself a 50 per cent raise on the RSP on one side, and then turn around to the union employees and say: "We're going to do this on this side. We're going to set a terrible example, and then we're going to expect you to take the higher ground and take it on the chin."

Let's take a look at another group that the government doesn't seem to want to touch, the inflated bureaucracy at Alberta Health Services. They previously had more than 90 vice-presidents until they shuffled those people into new roles with no change in pay. Now, the Minister of Health will tell you a thousand times from Sunday that, you know, they got rid of all the vice-presidents and now they're down to 10. The reality of it is that they didn't get rid of any. They fired five, which cost us a fortune because their contracts are so bloated with bureaucracy. Literally what they did is that they gave them all new name changes, and they expected the public just to look the other way. You cannot sit there and say, "We're going to make mediocre changes to Alberta Health Service's bureaucracy," which is really a cost to the taxpayer, and then turn around and penalize everyday front-line people who are providing the great services that we see at the likes of Michener, the likes of every single seniors' home. Our municipalities fall under this union as well.

Alberta Health Services gives out nontendered contracts for things like yoga, and executives are even treated to some New Age, out-of-this-world, six-figure coaching, but the government doesn't want to attack those perks. Instead, they bring across Bill 9. They didn't campaign on it. They didn't campaign on ending any of this. What they do is they sit there and they tell Albertans every single day, "We're working for you", when in reality what they're really doing is taking from them. Instead, you want to legislate changes to nurses' pensions, LPNs, health care aides, service personnel, sheriffs, health sciences that would take away their cost-of-living allowance.

5:20

This is the fundamental problem. You lose all credibility when, on one hand, you're robbing from Peter not to give to Paul but to pad your own pockets. That's exactly what's going on here. A 50

per cent raise in the RSP allowance goes into your own pockets. [interjections] The sole-source contracts at Alberta Health Services is a benefit to them themselves. There is no benefit to Albertans from executive coaching. There's not a single executive – and I would take you back to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. She gave an amazing member's statement. You can yell out all you want. I get that that's what you need to do because this is uncomfortable. I totally understand that. I get the heckling. That's fine. I'm happy to have you guys stand up in the House and address all of your comments and concerns to the chair. That's great.

The reality of it is that today the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek gave a moving member's statement talking about what front-line people do every single day: how they hold your hair back when you're getting sick; how they can't even put people in the patient restroom area, like where they can go and make phone calls, because it's full of beds; how our front-line personnel are honestly talking about how they might have to go to bunk beds to actually deal with clients who are coming in.

That's the problem with the waste in our system. You can't literally say to those folks, those folks who are changing your catheters, changing your diapers, rolling you over for bedsores, taking care of our children in foster care, making sure that those who are disabled have all the supports that they need – you can't turn around and say to them: you need to take less, but I'm going to take more. It's embarrassing, and the public isn't buying it.

You can make this about the unions wanting to protect their membership. You can make this about: we didn't take as many perks as we thought we could take. The reality of it is that you cannot enforce something on someone else until you yourself have set the example. Every single one of us who is a parent has seen this every single day. I cannot expect my daughter to do something that I would not do myself or that I haven't set the example of doing. I can't expect her to do that. This is a fundamental problem with our society, and this government is literally perpetuating it. It is symbolic of a government's lack of priorities. It is symbolic of a government that ignores the front lines while allowing the bureaucracy to grow. It is symbolic of a government that wants to freely take more benefits for themselves while legislating to take benefits away from others.

I can understand the argument on behalf of the unions wanting to protect their membership. I understand that. I also can understand the government saying that we need to do something to have pension reform and we need to roll out that process. The problem with this government is that they don't do things in consultation. They don't set the example. Two years ago you ran an election and you never, ever even brought this up.

The other problem that you have is that this government continues to download costs onto municipalities, onto everyday Albertans, roles and responsibilities that they are supposed to shoulder. Everyday Albertans can't take anymore, and everyday Albertans, our seniors, are maxed out. I know because I take care of my parents. I take care of my parents, who make a total of \$43,500. That's it. That's not huge money, and my mom works full-time. My dad was self-employed. He didn't have much of a pension, and I'm sure there were lots of bad decisions along the way. But that's all they have. My dad's pension is 844 bucks, and my mom makes a total of \$1,600 a month. That's it. And my mom is one of the people who is going to be affected by this. When you start telling people like her and telling people like LPNs that their pensions are going to be affected, they go into panic mode.

There's one thing this government could have done, and I don't know why they don't think about it. You could have campaigned on it, you could have made it clear, and you could have done it in

consultation with the unions. Instead, it's like this constant force of nature where this PC government decides: I'm going to do something, fly off the handle, and literally put in legislation that nobody supports and is going to impact 300,000 Albertans. I'm not exactly sure who they think votes for them, because 300,000 Albertans are going to remember this, and 300,000 Albertans' families are going to remember this bill. Mark my words. Bills 45, 46, and 9 are going to lose the 2016 election for the PCs. If that's their choice, that's their choice. Then, clearly, they made a campaign message, and that's the message that Albertans will get.

In the past the government negotiated all of these agreements. If they were inadequate, it is a problem of their own making. They cannot now put all of the blame directly onto unions and their front-line service workers and then literally come back and say: "Oops. Sorry. It wasn't our fault. It wasn't our fault." If this problem is as big as it is, it literally should have been at the forefront of at least the last two – two – terms of this current government, so since Premier Stelmach, because this didn't just come to light yesterday. You could have run a whole campaign on it, and you could have garnered support from unions and their membership.

You can achieve the reforms that you might want to achieve if you started talking about new hires and the impacts that this would have on new hires. You don't have to be retroactively punitive. You don't have to do that. There is no requirement for wholesale legislative change at this point in time. If it was there, it was there two years ago when you were in a campaign, and you could have been honest with Albertans.

The other thing I would just like to remind every single member in this House of. We can get into an ideological debate about whose plan is better. It's not what this is about. What this is about is literally every single person on the front line doing the best they can to provide services to our loved ones. So just remember that.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10
Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans
Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mr. Horner]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll keep this mercifully short. The original Employment Pension Plans Act reached royal assent, of course, less than two years ago, at the end of 2012. The original act was a regulatory response to the introduction of new types of pension plans, specifically involving targeted benefit pension plans and jointly sponsored pension plans as well as the implementation of the recommendations from the Alberta-British Columbia Joint Expert Panel on Pension Standards. There were some i's that were not dotted and some t's not crossed in that legislation, so we're back here fixing a couple of things that were missed. Essentially, it's been introduced to update and modernize the private-sector's pension plan legislation, and it gives the private sector the flexibility to use targeted pension plans if they so choose.

The Wildrose supports that choice being given to the private sector, and that is all we have to say about that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that wish to speak on Bill 10 in second reading?

Mr. Anderson: I would love to move to adjourn debate if that's okay with the Legislature.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 8
Appropriation Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm really glad to be able to get the chance to speak to Bill 8, the appropriation bill, in Committee of the Whole. I tried in second reading, but it turned out I had four seconds left before the vote was called. So I really appreciate this. The issue for me is that the way the budget debates are structured now, I can't be in every debate, so I've missed my opportunity to question and comment in the other 19 ministries that I wasn't able to attend the debates for.

A couple of things. I know I can't get responses back from the ministers, but maybe I can at least put some statements on the record. One of the first things that I want to note in Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, is the very first series of numbered votes, which is support to the Legislative Assembly. Specifically, I want to talk about the officers of the Legislative Assembly. Over the time that I have sat on the Legislative Offices Committee, which is from 2001 till now – this is our bastion. By "our" I mean Albertans' protection and also the government's protection. If something fails and it fails because the Auditor General didn't catch it – you know what? – it's not me that's going to catch heck for being on the Legislative Offices Committee; it's the government for not doing whatever they were supposed to do or the Auditor General says that they're supposed to do.

I think we have to be very careful when we examine the budget of those officers, making sure that we are funding them to be able to get the work done rather than approaching it by saying, "How little are we going to increase their budget by this year?" or, you know, "How much can we hold them back this year?" These are the areas that I think as officers and as members of this Assembly we really have to be careful about.

If the office of the Chief Electoral Officer fails because they couldn't get a good voters' list, who suffers from that? Democracy suffers. Every single citizen in Alberta suffers. Everybody in here suffers. It's a major problem. You know, we could end up in court and have the results of an election completely overturned. So that office having enough staff to be able to do the work they need to do is really critical.

That's for all of them. You know, that's for the Auditor General, the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is the court of last appeal. It's the last place where a citizen can appeal to get a fair hearing, let's call it. It's meant to be administrative. I think people often think that if they don't get the answer that they want or if they're, you know, unhappy with what the rule is, they can go to the ombudsperson and say, "Well, I'm unhappy because of this" or "I got ripped off because of this rule." That's not really their job. Their job is to make sure that the individual was treated the same as any other individual would be treated and that the full

administrative opportunities were offered to person A the same as they were offered to person B. Often the ombudsperson will say: "You know what? There is nothing here that would have helped this person, but there should be." And they spend time with the department negotiating to say: you should have some processes in place, and this is how we recommend you do it and fulfill some of this, you know, put some stuff in place.

I talked about the Chief Electoral Officer.

The office of the Ethics Commissioner. That's the public's belief in us. If that office doesn't have credibility, we don't have credibility. If we don't have credibility, then the legislation that we pass in here, people will blow it off. Why should they take it seriously if they don't take us seriously? That becomes a much larger problem because it's far beyond us. It's not personal anymore. It's that the work we've done here is not credible, which, frankly, is mostly going to, you know, come down on you guys. So I really don't need to be worrying about this so much, but I'm a nice gal, and I'm worrying on your behalf.

Mr. McIver: Bless your heart.

Ms Blakeman: There you go. Bless my heart. I know.

Actually, I'm worrying on behalf of democracy and all that good stuff. You know, that's why I'm talking about this.

The office of the Child and Youth Advocate is relatively new, about 18 months now, I think, or two years. We've talked a lot about how important it is to make sure that children have a voice in the way things are done here. That's certainly what that office is set up to do.

The office of the Public Interest Commissioner. That's the whistle-blower person, which I think hasn't really done anything because nobody felt protected enough by the legislation to blow the whistle on anything. But that's another conversation. Frankly, I don't think giving them any more money is going to change that. Unless you're going to change the protection for the people that are considering coming forward, that office isn't going to get a lot more business.

I just wanted to really underline that before we started because we do tend to approach those offices with that same sort of, you know, "How do we hold the line on these offices?" in the same way that we approach the other ministries, and I don't think that approach is appropriate for those offices.

My caucus, the third party Liberal opposition caucus, voted in favour of the budgets for Aboriginal Relations and Agriculture because our critic, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, felt they were reasonable budgets and both ministries were doing a fairly good job of administration. I have one little disagreement with him about that, about the elk, but for the purposes of my argument here, I'll just keep going. We were willing to vote in favour of that, so they were pulled out for separate votes. But we didn't vote in favour of the rest of it, and I think that there are a number of reasons why.

It's really frustrating to me how badly we have done with the Culture budget. You know, there is a lot of lip service. Tourism likes to put the picture of all those tens of thousands of people on the Folk Festival hill in their brochures and take advantage of all of the festivals and the arts that we do here. Lots of people talk about the economic development. We talk about the films coming in and revitalizing smaller communities. Lots of lip service but when it comes right down to it at Treasury Board, no money.

This is a particular job creator. It costs less money to create a job in the cultural industries and cultural community than it does in any other sector, so if you're trying to create more jobs for people, this is an area we could be concentrating on. It also is the

hub, the start of our creative industries. If we're trying to diversify Alberta, as we all keep mouthing for decades now about how we want to diversify our economy, but nobody actually does it, this is one of the ways to do it.

You know, Alberta has a sort of small, fingernail hold on being a centre for gaming in North America. We have a number of companies here that specialize in electronic digital games. I'm sorry; I don't actually play these, so I'm a bit at a loss here. I'm looking around for anyone under 40 that might be able to help me with the language. I'm thinking BioWare and some of the other ones that have sort of a story-based interaction that goes on, where you select an avatar or character and go through a series of storylines. We have amazing digital artists here, animators, voice-overs. There's a lot of talent that is coming out of the theatre pool, the dance pool, artists that are already here that are contributing what they know to a different sector, and that sector makes money, a lot of money. It's a great place to diversify.

5:40

In education I think there are a number of issues. The ones that I hear most often being brought up are overcrowded classrooms and the fact that we now have integrated classrooms and very high numbers. I admit that when I went to school I travelled through in a cohort that was between 36 and 39 students, which was okay. I don't have any bad memories of that. But you know what? There was not one kid in those 39 that had an issue with the English language, that needed ESL or whatever they call it now. There were no kids with any kind of behavioural problems. If there were, they got whisked off to a private school or an institution before you could say, "Gee whiz, I . . ." Nope. They were gone. There were no kids in that class that had any kind of physical or mental handicap. So the teachers taught, and the 39 of us learned. If the teacher needed to spend time with an individual student, they could do that, but there were no teacher aides in those classes.

Now we're expecting teachers to perform miracles. We keep cutting the budgets and changing the way that we code these kids and not giving the resources, which isn't always money, by the way, and not allowing the resources for the schools to support the students that are in it. I've talked about how wonderful my schools are. They have become experts in how to deal with kids that are nonverbal, that come from different language backgrounds, from different faith backgrounds, but also kids that come from trauma and torture. That may not be something that a lot of the rest of you deal with, kids in your school system that came out of Somalia or the Sudan, where they were born into war, where they were perhaps a child soldier, where they lived in a refugee camp somewhere else for a period of time before they came to Canada. Those are just not things that we considered, having kids like that in our schoolrooms. There are things that we need to do to help them become full, productive, engaged citizens that are contributing to our society.

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. I did get my 10 minutes of questioning the minister in that. There was a conference last week that the government participated in, and so did the city of Edmonton. Everything I looked at coming out of that conference just underlined that this government doesn't get it. They keep hoping that if they just put out enough PR and if they just say it often enough, it will be true. There has to be more. Talk is not enough. Pretty pictures are not enough. Nobody gives the government credibility when they say that they are great and responsible environmental stewards. There's just no credibility there . . .

An Hon. Member: Or that they're transparent.

Ms Blakeman: . . . or any kind of transparency, any kind of accountability in that whole file. People snicker and start to do other things because they're just not engaged and listening anymore.

Seriously, we have to look at a price on carbon. We have to look at how we're subsidizing coal and allowing it to continue to be what drives our electricity sector. We're just so far behind on that, and we just look silly now. I'm an Albertan, too. I don't want to look silly in the eyes of the world because my government just won't grapple with climate change and what really has to be done and action that needs to be taken.

Let me talk about some of the other ministries I didn't get to be involved in. In Executive Council I still see a lot of duplication of services between Executive Council and International and Intergovernmental Relations. There always seem to be two different departments, and they're each kind of delivering the same sort of thing. There have always been reasons about why that is, but they still don't ring true to me after all these years, and I think there are some ways to save some money there that could be used in other places by getting rid of that duplication.

Health. You can't explain to me and you can't explain to the people, you know, that are outside right now walking home how on earth you could put that much money into health care and not improve the access to it. It's just mind-blowing. And so much money. I know that people that work in the health sector, of all of the not-for-profit and public sectors, get paid the best salary. Anybody can look that up and find that out. But, holy mackerel, I don't know who was signing the paycheques and saying that this was okay over there. It's out of line, and there's a lot of waste and mismanagement, to anybody's eye, where we could be either saving money or redirecting money back in so that we had better services and better access times. The fact that we keep changing our targets and our monitoring benchmarks so it's harder for people to figure out if we've actually improved: it just looks really bad, and it's very frustrating.

Each year I see more and more money put into those departments and not put into other departments. Then everybody runs around, you know, with their hair on fire going: "Oh my God. Look at how much money we're putting into health care. That must mean that it's the best health care system in North America." Well, no, it's not. There's something very wrong if you're putting that much money into health care and you're not getting better results, if you're not getting better outcomes, and you're not. In comparing ourselves to others, we're just coming lower and lower on the measurement scales every time.

Human Services, the ministry of everything. You know, can I just jump ahead? I'm wondering how long we're going to have three associate ministers of disasters. Is that forever? Are those permanent now? Who am I asking this to? Municipal Affairs, I guess. We've got three ministers of different regions that are all responsible for flooding and disasters. I think: "Well, okay. Are you anticipating more disasters this year so that you need to keep people in place?" Or they haven't finished the job from last year, which also doesn't speak very well. [interjection] I don't begrudge you being a minister, sir, but there are – what? – nine of you that aren't a minister of something or other, just a few of you back there, good, hearty souls that are kind of holding down the teeter-totter on that side. I mean, honestly, you've got two full benches full of people that are some kind of minister or associate minister. You might want to look into that.

Anyway, let me get back on track here. Innovation and Advanced Education. This whole thing about the social . . .

Mr. Bilous: The social policy framework.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yeah. Well, the social policy framework just dissolved. It just went poof. None of you mentioned it. It wasn't mentioned in the throne speech. It wasn't mentioned in the budget. It's just, like, gone. Thousands of people put a lot of time into that, and I don't know what you did with it. Lit it on fire and smoked it or something? It's gone. That's not a good thing because we needed some framework that we could move forward on, so kindly give it back or reconstruct it or whatever. Spit it up so that we can have it back.

In Finance and in Innovation and Advanced Education the idea of these social justice funds, the social bonds: I just can't find very many places where these have really been successful. Where they have, they've been successful in a very narrow, very defined way, which is excellent, and I'm delighted when that happens. But as much as I hear this government kind of banking on these three funds – you know, in budget debates I say, "So how is this going to work?" "Well, we're figuring that out, and we'll let you know later in the year." How did you get a budget if you didn't know what you were doing?

5:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014. As New Democrats have been saying since this budget was tabled, we have clearly a tale of two Albertas, one set of rules and standards that apply to the very wealthy and the friends of this PC government and then one set of standards and realities for the rest of the province, which is probably more than 95 per cent of Albertans.

You know, I want to just list a couple of ways in which there is this tale of two Albertas. For example, in Budget 2014 there is \$150 million going in in-kind royalties to oil companies. Instead of, again, us collecting royalties from our natural resources, that are owned by all Albertans, today and future, we see these same companies getting \$150 million in in-kind royalties. This year's budget paid \$8.6 million in corporate subsidies to industry in the postsecondary education budget and a million dollar increase to the former Premier's office.

Meanwhile we've got middle-class families, your average Albertan, feeling the effect of this year's budget, with no reinvestment into postsecondary education, starving our students and placing Alberta at a disadvantage when it comes to a knowledge-based economy. Now, that's in spite of the fact that postsecondary institutions saw a \$147 million cut in last year's budget. We see the continuation of a broken promise of funding for full-day kindergarten – the former Premier, before she left, even said that it's unlikely that it will even exist by 2016 – and we saw a \$120 million tax cut from seniors' drug benefits.

You know, it's quite frustrating, Madam Chair, because the picture of Alberta could look much, much different. I think, first and foremost, some of my colleagues here in the House have talked about mismanagement of dollars, a waste of taxpayer dollars. I mean, look no further than AHS, when we look at how much goes to higher management. They play the shell game versus paying front-line workers, the folks who really make this province tick every day.

Also, this government is reluctant to look at three other areas which would increase the revenue that the government brings in, which would mean we could actually have smaller class sizes, that we could repair our crumbling infrastructure, whether it's schools,

hospitals, highways, bridges, and again cut down on our wait times and ensure that Albertans get the services that they deserve, especially from the fact, Madam Chair, that we are living in the wealthiest province in the country. Yet you wouldn't know it if you walked into the Misericordia hospital or into some of our schools that have 40-plus kids in a classroom.

The way to address these, Madam Chair, is obviously cleaning up the mismanagement of wasted dollars that this government has. AHS is one example. I just want to highlight the fact that it was the Alberta NDP that put forward amendments this year that would have eliminated the associate ministers' offices. I find it quite rich that more than half of the PC MLAs that are elected have some sort of ministerial post. I mean, I'd venture a guess that there might be more ministers in this provincial government than there are in any provincial government across the country.

Mr. Mason: Or the world.

Mr. Bilous: Or the world.

As well, we proposed an amendment to freeze the Premier's office budget. You know, those two different amendments would have saved over \$3 million in this budget, Madam Chair. So that's one example of cleaning up some of the mismanagement of dollars.

You know, to briefly touch on it again, the NDP has been calling for a review and an overhaul of our royalty regime within the province. Royalties are the lowest here of anywhere in North America. Again, we've got examples from our friends in the United States in jurisdictions like Alaska, that are run, you know, by Republican Senators and by the Republicans, and they pay more in royalties. And guess what? The companies aren't going anywhere.

Second of all, Madam Chair, again, within the last 10 years there has been a race to the bottom with corporate taxes. We went from 15 down to 10. I think a modest adjustment, still remaining competitive with other jurisdictions in the country, would increase revenues.

And then, of course, a move to a progressive taxation system, which I would like to highlight for a few members. You take a household income of, let's say, a hundred thousand dollars, and you compare what that family pays in taxes in Alberta under a flat tax at 10 per cent versus British Columbia or Ontario, where there is a progressive income tax system. With an income of a hundred

thousand dollars or less, they actually pay less than 10 per cent in taxes, so their take-home at the end of the day is actually larger than Alberta. In Alberta the flat tax for many Albertans is actually an Alberta disadvantage, yet this government continues to peddle that it's advantageous for everyone.

There are different ways to address revenue, but I just want to point out some of the issues that I have with this budget. Again, you know, this PC government continues to attack Alberta's most vulnerable. Not only have they abandoned their plan to eliminate child poverty – and I'll remind members that we're almost halfway there, and very little has been done on the promise that was made – but they've cut \$20 million from the PDD budget. There have been cuts to help low-income families get out of poverty. As well, funding to Human Services was well below the rate of population and inflation.

You know, again, it's almost humorous, if it wasn't so sad, when a minister gets up and says that we've increased our budget this year. Yeah, well, if it doesn't keep up with population and inflation, it's actually a cut. We see that in many, many areas as well as in our education system, Madam Chair. I'll get to it when I speak about Infrastructure, but we have aging infrastructure in this province. Again, I was speaking to a member earlier who said: "Yes, but Alberta has no deficit. We've cleared our books." Well, what we did was that within the last two decades we – and by "we" I mean this PC government – downloaded much of our debt onto the books of municipalities and off its own books.

You know, we've got hospitals that are crumbling. We've got schools that are aging. We've got a government that's forcing school boards to have to close schools in order to get one new one in a mature neighbourhood, which is really tying the hands of folks. I would have liked to have seen so much more out of this budget.

Let's see. What else can I talk about? Again, we have soaring child care costs in this province, Madam Chair. I have had friends and constituents that have two or more children come in and say: "You know what? Both of us parents could work, but it's not worth it for both of us to work because it's just as expensive."

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt, but it's 6 p.m. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the committee is recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, April 22, 2014

Issue 22e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
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Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),
 Liberal Opposition Whip
Kennedy-Glans, Donna, QC, Calgary-Varsity (Ind)
Khan, Stephen, St. Albert (PC)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
 Leader of the New Democrat Opposition
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)
McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
 New Democrat Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)
Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC),
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Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Hon. Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Redford, Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC)
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
 Official Opposition Whip
Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
 Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC),
 Government Whip
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (Ind)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 58 Wildrose: 17 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 8 Appropriation Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. This is the first time, actually, that I've been able to get up to speak to Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014, so I'm looking forward to offering up my comments regarding it. I'm just fiddling here so that I can find my clock, and in that way I can have some sense of how long I have been talking. I know it will feel like forever for everybody else, but for me I still need to get a sense of what that is. Okay. There we go. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Bill 8 is the Appropriation Act, which, of course, authorizes the government to go ahead with the budget that they have . . .

The Deputy Chair: Excuse me, hon. member. Hon. members, the noise level is a little high. If you have conversations, you can take them out into the other room. Otherwise, keep it low so that we can hear the speaker.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm doing my best to speak succinctly, but since I can't even pronounce the word, it's probably somewhat indicative of what is to follow.

We're talking about the budget that the government has put forward for all of us to vote on over the course of the next few days. Now, generally speaking, we've offered up comment around this budget to the effect that this government has a revenue problem, and because of that, they are making a number of cuts and, generally speaking, unwise decisions in order to deal with the fact that they are not collecting enough revenue.

There are really, in my view, Madam Chair, two explanations for their revenue problem. First of all, we have a flat tax in the province. You know, it's interesting. That flat tax has been in place now for – I don't know – 12 or 13 years. I'm not exactly sure how long. As much as everyone here threw themselves a little party and conducted a little parade around here to congratulate themselves on introducing this flat tax, it's very interesting because no other jurisdiction has followed suit. The reason no other jurisdiction has followed suit is because it's a really, really bad idea. It's a very unwise way of managing.

As a result, we here in Alberta are in a situation where, you know, if you earn – I can't remember what the figures were – somewhere between \$50,000 and \$70,000 a year, you pay more than the national average in taxes. But, lucky you, if you earn a million dollars a year, you do get away with roughly \$40,000 a year in savings. Now, you know, that \$40,000 a year in savings is pretty awesome, and I'm sure a lot of million-dollar-a-year income earners have invested excellent amounts of that \$40,000 in their third homes in Palm Springs and in, you know, the vineyards

that they visit on vacation, typically not in Alberta, and in all those places where they spend all that disposable cash that people tend to have when they earn a million dollars a year.

The question is: is that really wise? While we are ensuring that those fabulous million-dollar-a-year earners pay \$40,000 a year less in tax than they do in any other province, we are making decisions that impact very important services in this province and the vast majority of Albertans, who, just to be clear, are not earning a million dollars a year.

The other source of our revenue problem, of course, is that we continue to refuse to collect a reasonable share of the resources that we own. I don't want to get into a huge discussion about this, but I will say simply that the measures of what we collect relative to other jurisdictions in a similar situation to ours show that we collect the lowest amount. That says to me that there is room for us to capitalize on our natural resources for the benefit of the people who elected us as opposed to for the benefit of the multinational companies who are extracting that oil and in a fashion that is wiser and more judicious with respect to our resources. But we're not doing that, Madam Chair, and for that reason we are, you know, making cuts, or alternatively we are not caring for the most vulnerable Albertans in this province.

It's really kind of hard to focus in on all the places in this budget where I would want to see different priorities, but I will say, you know, that we've had one very interesting discussion repeatedly over the course of the last three or four weeks around the fact that we essentially have no access to justice in this province and that we can't fund our legal aid system. We have a Solicitor General who claims that his first priority is to ensure I think he calls it equality for taxpayers or something like that and that for that reason we need to sometimes compromise the principle of access to justice. That's disturbing, I have to say, Madam Chair, coming from the Solicitor General of the province.

But the fact of the matter is that I'm of the view that we truly are on the precipice of having our whole legal system collapse upon itself because it truly is an area that only the most wealthy and entitled of Albertans can actually make use of. We're spending many, many dollars to ensure that, you know, Enbridge can have its hundreds of thousands of days in court, but at the same time folks who need the intervention of the courts on family matters, who need the intervention of the courts on basic income security matters, who need the intervention of the courts judiciously and fairly in matters that impact upon their life, liberty, and security cannot get access to the courts in a way that the courts contemplated them getting access, and that is with fair representation. I think that at a certain point we run the risk of really losing public faith in the judicial system.

Of course, that's one area where we are making cuts to justify that \$40,000 a year that our million-dollar-a-year earners can pocket every year. Another one, of course, is the draconian cuts that this government has legislated or attempted to legislate and which find their way into this budget in the form of a salary freeze on public-sector employees in violation of their own legislation and, more importantly, in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These guys aren't just sort of, you know, picking and choosing and going: "Okay, folks. We all need to tighten our belts, and we're all in this together." No. They're ripping up the Constitution in order to go after a certain group of people who earn on average about \$52,000 a year. So it's a question of choices. They earn slightly more every year than those million dollar earners, that this government is so committed to protecting, get to save in taxes in this province and no other. That's who we're picking and choosing. In this government it's all

about choices, and I would suggest that they've really lost their way in terms of understanding who it is that they represent.

Now, when we look at issues in Human Services, which is one of my major areas that I pay attention to, you know, we had a Premier who ran to Albertans on what I would refer to as almost an NDP-light platform, shall we say. That was what she ran on, and in part of that, what she promised was to eliminate child poverty.

Mr. Hehr: You guys ran on a Liberal-light platform.

Ms Notley: And you guys joined the CPers for about 32 days.

An Hon. Member: The CP?

Ms Notley: The Communist Party.

Anyway, as we characterize what everybody else was actually representing at the time, the fact of the matter is that the former Premier promised Albertans, among other things, a plan to eliminate child poverty in five years, and she promised Albertans full-day kindergarten. Both of those things are actually not unreasonable commitments to make. The more early intervention we get, the greater the health, the education, and the economic, income-earning outcomes of those kids 15 years later. The studies are incontrovertible that moving to a full-day kindergarten system would have measurable results in the prosperity of all Albertans.

7:40

That was a good promise to make, the whole issue of eliminating child poverty in five years. Well, quite frankly, if we were to use our rather extensive resources and consider the kind of interventions brought in by the Ontario government with respect to the child tax credit, that too could go a long way to eliminating child poverty. Hey, with just a drop in the bucket, this whole notion of having a universal school lunch program, at least we'd be making sure that kids in our province, that everyone likes to claim as being so wealthy, would all actually have a full stomach while they're at school and learning. Yet we are the only province in the country that doesn't have school lunch programs funded by the government.

You know, we're making these decisions all the time to allow the gap between the extremely wealthy and everybody else to grow and grow and grow. That's a very intentional, policy-originated decision, and it is entirely reflected in this budget. This budget is a corporate budget that has long since abandoned the needs of the vast majority of Albertans.

The one thing these folks are doing in this budget is playing around with starting to put a little bit of money into developing their infrastructure although I actually find that kind of amusing because they're out there sort of trying to paint themselves as these great saviours and somehow having the foresight to initiate some investment in infrastructure. They see that that's kind of popular. They do that with themselves being the 43-year-old architects of the crumbling infrastructure that is now in such desperate need. Really, if I were them, I'd be embarrassed every time I talked about building Alberta. Whenever I see a Building Alberta sign or a Building Alberta commercial, I think: building the Alberta we broke. These guys are the ones that sat by for 43 years letting it fall to pieces.

To then turn around and try to convert that into a political plus: I have to say that it takes some political chutzpah. But I'm not convinced that even your 240 communications people are going to make Albertans buy it. Again, we can talk about your 240 communications people as being a whole other question of where

your priorities are as we continue yet another year of not including a school lunch program in the Human Services budget.

What else did we do this year? Well, we made some dramatic cuts to income support programs that would help people who are on income support get off income support and back into either schooling or into the workforce. Of course, the minister says: "Well, you know, we didn't really want to, but we haven't finished negotiating that with the federal government, so we had to make these massive 20, 30, 40 per cent cuts in our budget from what we're spending. But, you know, don't worry. We've kind of got our fingers crossed, and we're hoping that our pals in Ottawa will come through with the money that we think they might." Of course, we don't know if that's true, and we also don't know if what they come through with will actually be what we need.

In any event, the fact of the matter is that this is a province that also got themselves a billion dollar windfall from the federal government this year for health care funding and then chose to only put three-quarters of that into health, putting the other \$250 million windfall into their back pocket to maintain their ability to give that million-dollar-a-year income earner his \$40,000-a-year tax break.

See, I think that that money could have gone to make up for the employment support programs that we are not currently funding. So when we talk about eliminating child poverty, we could have actually done some meaningful stuff to get the parents of those kids who are poor off income support programs, which at this point run at about one-half of the low-income cut-off, which is a level that experts have long since indicated actually represents real poverty.

We are intentionally funding income support programs at about one-half of the poverty rate that we know to be true. We are intentionally having families live in that level of poverty. When we talk about getting those folks off those programs, we are now cutting the programs that would assist in that objective by 20, 30, 40 per cent because it's the federal government's problem, even as we're pocketing another \$250 million that we didn't expect to get, that was supposed to be going to health.

You know, again, it's just another choice. It's a choice about giving tax breaks to your wealthy friends. It's a choice about shovelling money out the door to the oil and gas industry in any one of a number of different subsidies and creative gift-giving strategies that this government has at their disposal when it comes to that particular select group. The difficulty, though, of course, is that Albertans lose in the process, and that's what this budget includes. That is what we are choosing to ignore.

Another area that would assist people in fighting against the trend towards a growing level of poverty and a growing level of inequality, of course, is postsecondary education. As you know, Madam Chair, we have the lowest percentage of people going on to postsecondary education in this province. We have the greatest income gap between men and women in this province, including those who have graduated from postsecondary education. We have the second-highest combined tuition and noninstructional fees in the country. On a per capita basis we're putting less money into postsecondary education. That's the status of that.

Yet, again, we are a province that has the kind of resources that 99 per cent of every other jurisdiction in the world could only begin to dream of. The degree to which we are frittering it away and not investing in genuine ways to diversify our economy, starting with investing in people, investing in our young people, investing in students, and ensuring that we actually could provide a first-class postsecondary education system with access which is affordable – this is something that we could have done in this budget.

We could have undone the truly ridiculous round of cuts that we had last year. Instead, you know, we picked away at a bit to try to make friends with a few political people here and there, but we really did not undo the damage that we imposed upon them through those cuts, nor did we actually invest in this sector in a way to move forward, to deal with the fact that ours is amongst the most expensive postsecondary systems in the country, to deal with the fact that our class sizes are growing, to deal with the fact that our infrastructure is going down, to deal with the fact that we have the lowest number of our high school kids transitioning into postsecondary in the country. Those are all things that we could have done if we could look beyond six months and that could be in this budget, but they're not there either, Madam Chair.

What else could we do to really grow the potential of this province? Well, child care. Every year I hope to see some kind of genuine investment in a truly affordable, accessible, nonprofit, public child care system in this province. The government loves to brag about how many child care spaces we have. Well, you know, we have had an increase in child care spaces. It's still a fraction of what we need, and the vast majority of them are unaffordable for regular Albertans. What that means is that children in Alberta are growing up in a potpourri of frantically sewn-together care arrangements, which undermine their future learning ability, which undermine their social growth, which undermine their sense of security. Of course, that happens the most in our lowest income families, continuing to increase the very gap that people claim we need to eliminate.

A proper child care system, like the one in Quebec, has been shown repeatedly to have measurable differences in outcome in terms of health, in terms of education, in terms of income. Again, it seems like a no-brainer in a province like this, where we have such a great amount of resources. It seems a no-brainer that we would introduce that kind of child care system here to really give an advantage to people who are born and raised in this province, to really have something that Albertans can be proud of, saying: "Yeah. You know what? We're in Alberta. We throw money on the fire when we're cold, but we also have this awesome child care program, and it made such a difference in my life and in my family's life."

You know, it does work that way because in Quebec the minute someone starts talking about taking away that child care program – well, politicians have learned that it's like threatening medicare, which, of course, I know that these guys also try to do but subversively. It's just something that people are proud of and know makes a difference in their lives. It's something that we could also look towards achieving if we had any creativity, if we had any notion of actually building Alberta for Albertans as opposed to a select slice of industrial friends and insiders who currently have this government's ear.

So that's sort of a brief summary of why I'm not keen on this budget and this bill and why I will be voting against it. There are certainly a number of other areas. I could go on at greater length. We haven't restored the funding to PDD. We are continuing to cut that funding through the SIS program, which everybody, depending on what day of the week you ask them, has a different opinion about and a different understanding of as to how it's being used. Either way, we shouldn't be using that to cut that population.

7:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's, as always, a privilege to speak to bills in this House, and I speak to Bill 8 in, no doubt, a similar fashion. It's a bill that I will be speaking against. In my view, this year's budget, like the last number of them, does little if anything to correct Alberta for the long term. I think the hon. member from the fourth party who just spoke touched on a lot of things that I, too, will touch on.

There's no doubt that the reason why we have a budget that doesn't seem to really address fundamental problems that are showing themselves to exist in Alberta is because we have a revenue problem. That has beyond a doubt been stated by former Finance ministers of the Progressive Conservative Party itself as well as economists of all stripes. In fact, it's more than evident when you look at the amount of programs and services and the ability of the government to do day-to-day tasks in this province. It's beyond clear that that is, in fact, the problem.

The hon. member did a good job of pointing out that we have many strange things here in Alberta. You know, you would tend to think that if we had gone to a flat tax in 2001 and if it was such a wise idea, that it brought such prosperity to this province, some other jurisdiction in this country would have followed along and said: "My goodness. Did that not lead to a whole bunch of prosperity? My goodness. Did everything just happen there? That was just amazing." But no. No other province has bothered to even look at it. I think it's because they know full well that it's ridiculous. It's ridiculous because, generally speaking, your middle-class taxpayer ends up paying more in taxes than your wealthiest citizen.

Furthermore, the real thing that it does as well is that it doesn't collect the global amount of revenue that a true progressive tax system would. By bringing in more revenue, of course, we could do some of these things in Alberta that clearly are not being done given the revenue sources that are available to the government under its current fiscal structure. Let's take a look. What are some of those things? I think they're well known, some of them. The school lunch program: we're the only jurisdiction in Canada that doesn't have one. Full-day kindergarten: I believe we're the jurisdiction that is furthest behind on this issue. The hon. member brought up a great thing. Our legal aid programs are in a shambles. Our welfare payments or our Alberta Works payments are the lowest in the land by a country mile. All of these things are nothing to be proud of. Furthermore, given the fact that we apparently need schools and need them fast and we haven't built them in a generation – there's a reason why. We haven't collected any revenue.

I guess the other thing we can look at is not only that we need these things today – there is no doubt in my mind that we need these things today – but as a result of our fiscal structure we have managed to go through the vast majority of nonrenewable resource revenue we have brought in. One has to look back to 1971, when this government took over, and the fact is that we brought in and fundamentally spent virtually all the oil wealth. We've saved \$16 billion, and we brought in close to \$400 billion. Really, where has that money gone? If you look at it, it's tax breaks, okay? It's tax breaks and an inability to collect revenue for things we need.

You know, we can just look at the evidence. Any way you cut it, it's absurd as to where we are, and to have not changed course over the last two years is beyond me. I'm actually interested: how is the current government going to defend, going into the next election, the record of how they have run things? Either way you cut it, simply put, we don't have the services that other provinces seem to have. Now, even without the services, we're heading up

to \$21 billion in debt. Like, any way you look at this, this is just silly.

I would also like to bring up the fact that there are other things in this province that we could use that have been implemented in other provinces. I think the hon. member brought up – and I'm a big believer in this, too – daycare spaces in our communities here in Alberta. Right now if you look across the lay of the land, we don't have enough daycare spaces in Calgary for the number of people that need them. Furthermore, the space for one child in Calgary is between \$1,600 and \$1,700. Clearly, that is unaffordable for many if not most working families. When you see a problem like that out there, you have to look around. You have to look at jurisdictions that are doing things to eliminate a problem. One of those jurisdictions is Quebec, that has had their national child care program now for 15 years. It allows people to have their kids in high-quality learn-through-play programs from the time they're born to the time they're six years old.

Not only are these available; they're actually having tremendous results. You know that we all look to PISA, these international educational studies that are evaluating education systems. If you look at Alberta's scores, we tend to be trending downwards. Actually, so does every jurisdiction in Canada except for Quebec. Wouldn't you know it? That's because they've had 15 years of having an early childhood daycare program where kids learn through play. This is not some government boondoggle. This is something that I think all parties should eventually just support.

You want to know why, Madam Chair? Because it's revenue neutral. You heard me. It's revenue neutral. After you establish it with some initial seed money, inside of five years the Quebec daycare program – and this was done by experts, economists and the like, who say it's revenue neutral. You know why? Because young families and in particular young mothers are out working, having jobs, paying taxes, and then some are not staying at home collecting income support or EI as long as they usually do. They're out working. That should be something that even my right-of-centre friends should be interested in, a revenue-neutral policy that helps kids learn and get ready for grade 1, as is clearly shown by the PISA exams as well as by experts who have looked at the reasons why Quebec is doing better on these tests, and it allows it to be revenue neutral.

Really, it's one of those things that – if you look at a piece of government policy that all parties should adopt because of its revenue neutrality, it's that daycare component. Simply put, the more time we waste on not doing it – it's beyond me, and to be honest it plays into a mindset of not understanding young families and in particular not understanding what women need to succeed in the world today. I think we need to move on that quickly.

8:00

There are a whole host of areas in Alberta where – I guess it's great – most people have a job on Monday morning, but I think that at this venture we have to ask ourselves if this is really working for everyone. Really, is this all there is? We don't have schools in neighbourhoods where kids live. We don't have a social safety net that assists people when they are needing either a lawyer to defend them in court or needing to get social assistance when they find themselves out of work. We're unable to do many of the things that other provinces with reasonable fiscal structures can do.

I'm wondering if that's right. To be honest, I think that at least the PC Party with their platform that they ran on in the last election seemed to have the pulse of the electorate and seemed to understand that and seemed to be heading in that direction. Like the hon. member from the New Democrat Party said, they ran on a

New Democrat light platform, and I pointed out that the New Democrats ran on a Liberal light policy program on that one, just to put that into perspective, you know. There seemed to be a general sense of where our electorate was and where we needed to go and the like, but the fundamental difficulty is that despite this understanding, the government refused to do anything about it.

If they would address the revenue problem even in some small fashion – I brought this up before. There is an \$11 billion gap between our fiscal structure and Saskatchewan's fiscal structure, the second-lowest taxed province. Even if they would have taken back, say, \$4 billion or \$5 billion of that gap, they would have been able to deliver on the entire platform. The entire platform. They would have been able to build the schools, they would have been able to do the roads and the hospitals, provide the care, and start eliminating child poverty. All that stuff was possible if they would have gone in and actually addressed a problem that has been nagging us for a while.

Instead, the brain trust said: "Oh, my God. We can't fix what's broken. We've just got to continue doing what we're doing." Sure enough, that's why I think we're here, you know, at this point in time searching for a new Premier and the like. I have every sense that when you don't keep your promises in an election, it's just not going to happen for you. But that's where we are.

In any event, I was disappointed in the budget for those reasons. It seems like we have not addressed the revenue problem. By not addressing the revenue problem, we may just be destined to continue spending all this oil wealth in one generation. That's what we've done over the last 25 years. If we haven't learned it now, I'm not certain when we're going to learn it, Madam Chair. There is much that needs to be done today as well as tomorrow.

Thank you very much. Take care.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'd just like to remind everyone that the noise level is climbing again. Please try to keep it low so that we can hear the speakers.

Are there any other members who would like to comment or question or have amendments on Bill 8? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to share some feedback on the budget from the Calgary-Varsity constituency. I want to start off with the positives, and there are many. Our constituency was very pleased with the discipline of having a three-year budget vision and alignment to that vision and reporting on that three-year cycle. So kudos to the minister.

Our constituency is largely also in support of borrowing for capital, with a repayment plan clearly marked out. It felt like things got a little bit beyond what was expected, beyond the \$5 billion a year for capital, but there is a sense that the flood costs and the infrastructure costs associated with the flood were a reasonable explanation for that.

Our constituency is also the beneficiary of a lot of third-party funding for infrastructure at the university, at the Children's hospital, at the Foothills hospital. They would like to have the opportunity to do even more of that with greater impact in the future. We understand that the Ministry of Infrastructure is responsible for that, but we would also hope that the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board would take a leadership role in that as well and set a very clear course. There are decisions we're making now like spending money on big roads.

Highway 63 is a very expensive road that needs to be built in this province, but perhaps we need to have different conversations about infrastructure. Some of the examples I hear from my constituents are: would we rather have more assisted living for

seniors in our constituency, more youth mental health facilities, and some of the billions that are going into highway 63, for example, and other road infrastructure redirected to those kinds of needs instead by being able to attract third-party investors into roads and other infrastructure? I think we see greater potential than is being realized right now.

The results-based budgeting process is viewed very, very positively in Calgary-Varsity because people see it as a process, a policy tool that allows us to test value for money, especially around program spending and around the role of government and better definition. But they're asking for more hard information on the outcomes of that process. They would like to see it, and I think it would be beneficial for all Albertans to understand that with greater detail.

One of the points in the budget that I've heard a lot about in our constituency and a lot of disgruntlement about is the Alberta future fund, the \$2 billion going from the heritage savings trust fund into general revenues for a purpose that is not clearly defined at this point in time. It may just be the way our constituents are wired, but they want to understand why that money is leaving the heritage savings trust fund, which they hold very dearly, into general revenues. They would like to understand that.

That concludes my comments on behalf of Calgary-Varsity. I fully support this budget and will be voting in favour of it. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the appropriation bill here once again. As you can see, in the spirit of equity and equality I deferred to the Member for Calgary-Varsity. I was curious about what she had to say as well. It's somewhat chivalrous but also a little bit Machiavellian. I wanted to see what you were up to back there. Now I know.

You know, it's interesting. I haven't seen these advertisements yet, but I heard word that they switched the building Alberta concept now from sort of signs on the side of the road every half-kilometre or so and in every little nook and cranny in the province. Now they have Building Alberta advertisements for the new budget, apparently.

In the spirit of my own imagination, not having seen these yet, I'm wondering exactly how these advertisements are going to look, right? Do they sweep past the Misericordia hospital, where the nurses today told me when I was there that the air system wasn't working, so the place was at, like, 35 degrees, and where the attendants had to deal with the backup in the sewer again? Or do these advertisements somehow flip over to the postsecondary institutions, our universities, where students are literally not able to afford to go anymore every time you raise tuition so dramatically like it has been done over this last decade? Do you realize that a whole other socioeconomic class of people simply drop out of that institution, regardless of their ability to actually pass and thrive in that postsecondary institution, purely for financial reasons? I'm wondering if these advertisements, this new building Alberta budget, flip over to the fact that while in the midst of an economic growth, almost an unprecedented economic growth, I think, at least regionally, and certainly an unprecedented population growth, all the public service wages are frozen again here in the province of Alberta.

When you look at the very highest inflation rate in Canada here in this province, our entire public service, the very people who actually make this Legislature run here, each of your ministries –

do you think that you can look each of your workers in the eye and say: "Thanks a lot. Here's your budget cut, and by the way we're going after your pensions this year, too?" Do you really think, if you could read their minds, about what you honestly would see inside? That's harder to do in an advertisement, I guess. You can't show what's in people's minds. I guess you could show a little thought cloud, perhaps, or something like that.

8:10

I'm wondering as well, with the budget that we saw this year, if we take into consideration the longer term situation – right? – as they claim to do in this budget. They say that we're taking a three-year cycle. Well, that's great. It's a good idea. I certainly concur with that. But the cycles of three years: you can move them any which way you want. If you move it back two years, then in fact we suffered significant cuts over those three-year periods. In postsecondary while we might have put back \$48 million, last year, not three years ago, not even 12 months ago, we took out \$148 million. Madam Chair, I really have a hard time trying to get my head around this budget.

You know, I would like to support a budget at some point. I mean, it's not an unheard-of thing. If something reasonable and fair and in balance serves the best interests of Albertans, then certainly I would be happy to vote for the budget. But this one, with all of its sort of flashy paint job and new aluminum rims and maybe some fancy headlights and all this kind of thing, is really the same broken-down old thing that we've seen over the last number of years that really doesn't serve the public interests very well at all.

Yes, you can say that we spent a lot of money. There are billions of dollars in this budget, and certainly our economy is hot. But where is the substantial, equitable, sustainable, and socially just policy that would be commensurate with all of that wealth? All of that wealth is a privilege, Madam Chair. It's not as though we just, you know, created it out of dust. It's a privilege based on nonrenewable resource money that simply is a one-time deal. Maybe it lasts over 40-some years, but it still is not renewable unless we figure out a way to make oil out of water. That would be even more ridiculous because the water will become more expensive, in fact, than the oil will. Unless we manage to create some sort of magician's trick, then all of the money and the effort that we're spending on these budgets are nothing but living on borrowed time. We're living on borrowed time just like your mom and dad probably told you when you were a wayward teenager, right? We all were at some point in our lives, Edmonton-Strathcona excluded, I'm sure, straight and narrow as the Peace River as it winds its way through northern Alberta.

Living on borrowed time is a very serious thing, though, right? We only can presume that we earn the good trust and the equity that we earn through our hard work and effort and good intentions. When you spend a good portion of your nonrenewable energy resources to pay for regular budget items, then that's the very opposite of equitable and sustainable and working off the sweat of good policy. Rather, it's a very short-sighted thing.

I mean, we've heard this before, but we will continue to say it again more emphatically than ever because more Albertans are catching on to this idea, Madam Chair. They're catching on that this not a sustainable thing. It's not ethical, but it also isn't working for them and their families so much anymore either. What's happening here in the province is that as we depend more and more heavily on a single economy and a single aspect of that economy, which is taking raw energy resources and trying to export them as raw and as unprocessed and sort of as fixed as possible to other locations to find that value-added in places like

the United States or Asia or elsewhere, as our economy pulls apart like that, polarizes, so does the local economy and all of the different socioeconomic strata that exist in our local economy here in the province.

We hear it so often: the rich get richer. Well, yeah. You know what? We can see a textbook case of that here in the province of Alberta today, and we exacerbate that problem by having a very, very primitive and unethical tax structure which only benefits the very, very wealthiest people in the province.

We know the scale now. I don't have it in front of me, but if you are making a lot of money, more than a million dollars a year, then you are in the very best place in the country to live, for sure, economically. Now, you are in a very awesome place to live if you're not making a million dollars, too. But if you are doing so here, it's like you've won the bonanza. It's like you've won the lottery every single year. You get the equivalent of, you know, a mid-sized luxury car in your tax benefits because you live in Alberta and you're making a million dollars a year here.

There are people that are putting their residences here in Alberta – right? – and working and operating out of other provinces because they make more than a million dollars a year and they can use this place as some kind of a tax haven.

An Hon. Member: Maybe they make more money.

Mr. Eggen: Really. I mean, that's not only unethical; it's not even reasonable for the people who are doing that here in this province to be doing it in other provinces, ripping them off. On the corporate level we see the same thing, too, where you have lower corporate taxes here in the province of Alberta.

You know what the Americans do? If you are paying a lower corporate tax level than you would pay back in the United States, then they'll just charge you the difference. So for us to have a lower corporate tax level here in the province of Alberta, we are simply subsidizing the United States government, who takes the balance from that same corporation who files their taxes in the United States.

A lot of people don't realize that to be true. We do. Absolutely. But as they start to warm up to the idea, this nagging notion that the promised land here in Alberta is not working out so great for the middle class, for regular working people who don't earn a million dollars – maybe they earn \$70,000 or \$50,000 or \$80,000 or \$40,000—for them that tax structure doesn't work. They're paying more in Alberta than other places.

The affordability issue is really starting to come back and bite us on the backside, Madam Chair. I don't know if anybody noticed that the real estate market in all of our major centres is on fire. Lots of people who, let's say, own houses or multiple houses or invest in real estate probably will say: well, that's great. But for most of us it simply means that we pay a lot more. You pay a lot more when you move, you pay a lot more if you're renting, and you pay a lot more for all of the other goods and services that trickle down through a hot real estate market in any given urban centre.

You know, when I look at the Appropriation Act, Bill 8, it's a reminder that we do very well in this province, that we deal with a very, very strong budget. We can provide lots of strong goods and services here. Of course, we should, and of course we would, and of course we could do a whole lot better if we had the common sense to make investments in key areas that create what I say are value-added human investments – right? – making value-added human investments.

We've heard a lot about it already. I mean, when I go back to the K to 12 schools, I'm absolutely shocked by the class sizes. Again,

another place for your Building Alberta budget advertisements, right? Try passing by a high school with your camera, and you'll see 40 kids in the class. It's difficult to teach kids properly and mark the papers properly and actually run a functional modern education in the classroom when there are simply too many kids to deal with. We've seen it before, but I know, looking at these budget line items, that we don't have to be seeing this again here in this province in 2014.

You know, for all the kids that you don't give the time of day to, where you're not able to learn their situation, their learning styles, maybe some of the challenges they might have, either personally or academically, that contributes again to our low graduation rates and our falling test scores and all of that kind of thing, the lowest graduation rate in the country and, as we've seen, people bemoaning these test scores falling over time. Well, they're not going to go up, Madam Chair, at all over the next five years because – you know what? – the kids that will be writing those tests in the next five years are in these large, overheated classrooms right now.

8:20

It's not like there's going to be a miracle happen, right? Human education takes place on a developmental level. At each different time and place, from three years old till 18 years old, different developmental stages are hit. Those sweet spots are either there and you address them with good education, or those kids lose out, and it doesn't come back necessarily. You don't give a student three years in high school classes with 40 kids in a class, and they do sort of mediocre, and then expect that suddenly something miraculous will happen and change it over. I mean, sure, people change over time, but you've given that person a handicap right from the beginning, and that handicap passes right back to this very Chamber, to this very budget and the fact that we're not paying for the goods and services that we are legally legislated to do so here in this Chamber and provide that public interest and provide the funding and the personnel.

I was asked to talk about EMS and hospital wait times again today, you know, meeting the targets, right? I wanted to think about what I was going to talk about here tonight with Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014. You can't blame EMS workers as they run around from place to place looking for an emergency room and active treatment beds that are available to them. Every little space along the way, where they're maybe not staffed up the way they should be in the emergency room or in the wards or in the long-term care facility, coming out the other side, each step of the way, one little piece of that, adds up to a very large problem when you add it all together. That's kind of the sum total of this budget, too. That's the problem that I have with it, quite frankly.

You know, there are ways by which we could fix it, right? Alberta New Democrats know that part of the budget that we don't ever just deal with properly here on this side is the revenue side. We know that there are billions of dollars that are flowing through our economy here right now, and we're simply not capturing them. To me that's irresponsible. It speaks of, again, this very cavalier attitude towards our nonrenewable resources, that we don't put a price tag on them which is commensurate with the value of them not just now but in the future, plus the responsibility we have to those nonrenewable resources in regard to the damage that is done in regard to the environment and in regard to the carbon and so forth. If we do start to capture those resources, have a modest increase in the royalties that we take from our nonrenewable energy resources and invest that in a long-term plan, not just in yearly cost expenditures like we have here but

start to save that money for now and for the future, we would just be so much better off.

As I said before, the flat tax is, again, quite irresponsible. Our corporate tax rate only serves to feed to the bottom here somehow. You know, sometimes I wonder where – like, on a practical level, it seems so obvious – this government gets all of these ideas from. Do they go to some kind of special convention somewhere, where they all talk about all of these things, and say: “Well, yes, we know that your pensions are actually really good here in Alberta. But, listen, we need you to cut them as well because we’re doing it over here in Albania and in Alabama and in wherever. So just for us to look like we’re all normal somehow, that this is the new normal, we need you to cut your defined benefit pensions in Alberta, too, if you don’t mind. Thank you very much?”

I don’t know if there is that kind of convention somewhere, but it’s got to be like that because I don’t see logic and reasonableness. I know there are lots of very logical and reasonable people across the way over there. I quite like some of them, really. They have nice suits, and they seem to laugh at jokes and things like that.

But when it comes to these very fundamental policy issues like progressive taxation or investing in renewable energy by increasing our revenue share of nonrenewable energy resources or investing in preventative health care or putting serious money into K to 12 education or actually having policies that would eradicate child poverty in this province here in the next five years and poverty in general by having a reasonable, common-sense approach to labour, not this antagonistic sort of Fred Flintstone kind of fight-it-out, you know, shoot-it-out and see what happens kind of thing, or giving safety and security to our seniors so that they know now and in the future that there will be some small, reasonable policy in home care and health care and pensions available to them, I mean, all of those things are not like they’re radical ideas, right?

I’ve noticed since I’ve become politically aware that what was probably progressive 20 years ago may be more left-wing thinking now. You know, for New Democrats we sound like a bunch of Lougheed PCers – right? – talking about these things. I guess that’s the way things are. You’ve got to start somewhere. But it must be kind of embarrassing when you go to bed at night to know that over the last 40 years you’ve taken this province so far to the right that it’s difficult to recognize it really.

So I think that we will not vote for this budget. I feel a little bit embarrassed about that, a little bit sad – right? – because we work so hard on these things, but I know that we can do better, too. I think that I can see some change on the horizon coming. I can see that people are not just putting up with the same old thing, where the PC government tells everybody to be quiet and take your medicine, you know, the go back to sleep sort of attitude. We’re becoming a much more sophisticated province than we ever have been. We are more than 4 million people here. We’ve become one of the great economic leaders of Canada, we’re the most urbanized population in the country, and Albertans are smart. They have a very practical sense of not just a tomorrow sort of attitude but long-range planning.

People don’t move to Alberta just on a whim. People move here from other countries with their families and so forth expecting a better future, and a better future isn’t just, you know, a couple of bucks and a flat-screen TV, right? It’s to know that you have the public institutions, that public interest is invested in, and it will continue to be invested in and strengthened for not just tomorrow but for the next generation.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I’m pleased to rise and speak, my first opportunity also, to Bill 8, the Budget 2014 appropriations. Let me begin with a few questions. What is the role of government? Well, surely, we all are clear in this House that the role of government is to provide leadership through fair laws, services, oversight, and a stable resource base to protect people and the planet for the long term. Those are pretty basic. It’s a pretty basic understanding that I’ve come to after just a few years in this job. Sadly, I haven’t seen a lot of evidence that the government shares the same definition for the role of government; that is, leadership, fair laws, adequate services, oversight, and a stable resource base for people and the environment.

Jumping directly to Budget 2014, does it do this? Does it provide for that fundamental role of government? Alberta Liberals get a resounding no from the people that we consult with. From our constituents there is a clear rejection of this 43-year-old PC government’s attempt to provide a resource base for the next year that will adequately address these fundamental roles of government.

Let’s look at each one of these individually. Providing stewardship of resources and a sustainable energy future. Clearly, this government has been so obsessed with one resource and one type of energy future that we have lost our way in terms of providing cost-effective, environmentally responsible, and sustainable energy for not only our generation but the next generation. Small, late investments in energy efficiency, conservation measures, renewables. Again, I guess it comes down to the question of how this government defines its role in our society. It’s unfortunate to see again the recurring theme of short-term thinking and heavy influence from the private sector.

8:30

There’s nothing wrong with the private sector. There’s nothing untenable about their goals and their agendas to create jobs and to create an economy. What is the problem is a government that doesn’t see its role as being the referee between the long-term public interest and the short-term corporate interests and a lack of attention to the longer term public liabilities that many of these developments have created. Many of these industries have put down pennies on the dollar for reclamation, for example, for the largest mining operation on the planet.

If things go south in terms of our oil industry, and there’s reason to believe that it could given alternatives that are emerging and liabilities associated with carbon and our environmental crisis in relation to climate change, it is very foreseeable that our primary resource may become less valuable on the planet than it is today, leaving tremendous stranded assets for us now and in our future to deal with. A few hundred million dollars will barely touch the oil sands in terms of reclamation. If these folks walk away, we and our future generations are stuck. That’s a tremendous contributor to what we are calling intergenerational theft on this side of the House.

Unlike an upstream orphan fund for conventional oil and gas abandonment, we have no downstream oil and gas orphan fund for refineries and sites that are developed for various petrochemical operations and gas station operations, no ability to hold people accountable if they walk away from these, again a huge public liability; a failure to really address what is an appropriate scope and scale of development in our oil and gas sector, again resulting in a total imbalance between resources coming in and the potential liabilities for the future; an almost complete absence of savings for

our future, a wonderful start in the '70s under Peter Lougheed with the heritage fund and almost nothing added since then.

In any other country this would be a scandal. There would be people on the streets. But we are in a petrostate, and with low taxes and an apparent inability to influence the direction of this government, a lot of people have walked away from their civic duty and, unfortunately, have been discouraged about their political role. I think people are reuniting and regalvanizing and re-energizing around the political nature in Alberta and seeing both the short-term and long-term risks of the way we are budgeting and managing.

The second element is a fair revenue system. Again, as has been said by my colleague in Calgary-Buffalo, we are living at the very bottom of the barrel in terms of resource revenues, tax revenues, and the ability to meet our obligations as a government to protect people and the planet. Stable, dependable funding: impossible. Whether it's schools or hospitals or roads or people with disabilities or municipalities and their infrastructure and maintenance needs, we cannot begin to meet those demands with stable funding; a budget that simply looks, again, at the short term and emphasizes the business opportunities in Alberta instead of looking at the responsibility for services and sustainable funding for people and the monitoring of our planet.

A third area, protecting the environment: loss of boreal forests; loss of habitat; threatened species; a loss of wetlands with, clearly, no credible wetlands policy yet in 2014; not recognizing the critical nature of the environmental goods and services that are unconsciously declining and that, indeed, the economy is a subset of the environment and must be recognized as a subset. If we do not take care of the environment, we will have no economy. Unfortunately, we are still acting like this is a frontier with endless opportunities for land and water and squandering those in the name of short-term gain.

A fourth area is providing infrastructure and public services to ensure that every person can reach their potential. Does this budget do that? Well, no, Madam Chair. Again, we see a huge deferred maintenance problem in this province, a lack of school spaces, overcrowding, reduced postsecondary opportunities at a time when we desperately need innovation and investment in our young people in terms of both their futures and their capacity to contribute to the economy. This speaks again to a government that has not really examined its critical role in terms of developing leadership and stable revenue and an honest look at what will serve the long-term public interest.

To quote someone that many in here will recognize, Ken Chapman: we are not going from good to great in Alberta; we are not even serving the greater good. It's clearly time for this government to look at where its priorities are and to recognize that the more Albertans learn about the lack of long-term vision and commitment to a sustainable future, whether it's in terms of our children's care or in terms of a revenue stream and the infrastructure that this province needs or whether it's in terms of our environment and a new energy future that the rest of the planet is moving to – we have not seen evidence that this government with this budget gets it.

There's no question on this side of the House that the Liberal opposition will not be supporting this budget. I dare say that thousands of people across this province will recognize that it's time for change in this coming year as we move towards an election.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate your indulgence. There were just a few more points that I wanted to make that I didn't get a chance to finish up on when I last spoke. I want to talk just a little bit about some of the things that we would have done or that we thought were important in terms of what should have been included in this budget. I spoke already a little bit about some of the challenges that students in the postsecondary education system face, but I also want to just talk a little bit about the infrastructure maintenance program.

You know, I think it was in their comprehensive institutional plan, that was released in January, that at that time the U of A noted that although there had been a little bit of a reinvestment into their infrastructure maintenance, in order to avoid catastrophic failure – catastrophic failure – of some of their building systems, they needed all of the infrastructure maintenance program funding, which had been cut a couple of years prior to that, to be reinvested. So that's a problem. I mean, it's not technically in my riding, but it's immediately adjacent to my riding. A lot of people that I know attend and work at the U of A, and I am disconcerted by the notion of catastrophic failure of some of their infrastructure. That's something that the government ought to have invested in.

Another thing that I'm concerned about within the budget is the issue of seniors' drug benefits. Now, last year the government announced that it was going to cut, I believe it was, about \$130 million, if anyone wants to correct me, from seniors' drug benefits by restructuring the program. Then after much consultation and then more consultation and additional consultation – it was good that they did that, but perhaps I would have suggested that they do that beforehand – they decided not to move ahead as quickly.

8:40

Then in this budget we found a \$120 million budget cut, which they claim can be reached simply by the conversion to generic drugs. I believe that was the explanation for that. I'm a little bit worried that, in fact, what we might really be seeing here is that the government has set a target to reduce the costs or the benefits associated with seniors' drug benefits and that they're going to get to it one way or the other. That's very much a concern of mine, and I'm not happy that that is included in the budget.

You know, I talked a bit about child poverty and poverty reduction, but one thing – and I didn't have the chance to look at my notes – is that we have roughly 400,000 Albertans who live in poverty, Madam Chair. That's 400,000. Some people, some institutions, estimate that that very fact of people living in poverty actually costs roughly \$7 billion a year to the system with the increased demand on our public services. Now, we spend about \$40 billion a year. Imagine if you could eliminate a lot of that poverty and reduce that \$7 billion pressure on our system. There is actually – dare I say it? – a cost-benefit analysis to the notion of reducing poverty, not in a social impact bonds kind of way because those are scary for a whole schvack of other reasons, but generally speaking, in a good governance kind of way, you could see long-term savings by investing in a reduction of the gap between rich and poor in this province.

Another thing that I wanted to just talk about was that I had said that there was a billion dollar Health windfall and that the government was spending \$750 million. I think that it was actually more that there was a \$1.3 billion windfall from the federal Ministry of Health to Alberta and that they'd only allocated \$600 million of those dollars into the health system. We're short about \$600 million or \$700 million that should have also been allocated to the health system.

You know, what would we have done with that to deal with the front-line services in our health system, to improve that? Well, we

could have invested in quality public long-term care beds for our seniors. We know that the absence of properly staffed, high-level care long-term care beds is what is backing up our emergency rooms. That is as true now as it was two years ago as it was four years ago as it was whenever we raised the issue. In fact, we also know that the number of long-term care beds is not only not keeping pace with our population, but that, in fact, they are being reduced and, theoretically, replaced with these notional little supportive living, pay-out-of-your-pocket kinds of scenarios that the government is orchestrating in order to enhance creeping and/or jogging privatization.

That's wrong. Bad management. It will cost taxpayers more. It will make more money for these guys' friends in long-term care or, you know, supportive living, but it certainly overall will not benefit the majority of Albertans. I mean, it's a constant thing. We're all MLAs here. We all have people come and tell us what's wrong. I can't imagine that there's a single MLA here who hasn't heard about the many problems and shortcomings of our long-term care system. I mean, come on. We could have invested some of the money into that.

We could have, as I said, reduced the costs of prescription drugs borne by seniors and low-income Albertans. We could have looked at the issue of providing more resources to mental health care. It's a travesty the way we provide mental health care in this province, and every study that's been undertaken shows that we are probably the most poorly performing province in the country when it comes to providing a well-planned and thoroughly managed system around mental health care.

These are some of the things that that \$600 million is not being allocated to in health care even though it came from the federal government for health care, what it could have gone towards. I think that even at his most offensive the Minister of Health could not avoid admitting that there is a great deal that could be improved in our health care system.

When I ran out of time to speak last time, I was talking about PDD and the community access supports. Of course, that was the area last year that received the \$45 million cut. Then, you know, we saw some of that money go back in this year, but ultimately it hasn't all gone back. I've been meeting with families, I've been meeting with service providers, I've been meeting with service recipients, and what I'm hearing is a very different story than what the government has been telling people.

What I'm hearing is that, you know, the SIS assessments are being applied and that in many cases it's resulting in reduced services. Although the government has said, "Oh, well, no; your SIS can be appealed," they're unable to tell us how many have been appealed and how many have been reviewed and what the outcomes of those appeals are. Why? Because there are no actual appeals going on. Meanwhile I'm hearing from people who have filed 15, 16 appeals, and they still haven't heard back from the government a year afterwards. So the fact of the matter is that "you can appeal" was one of those talking points that was thrown out the door last summer when they were in crisis, but it's not something that they followed up on. That all comes down to cost, and the outcome is that these very, very vulnerable Albertans receive less funding.

Dr. Swann: Sounds similar to the children dying in care scenario.

Ms Notley: It's very similar to the children dying in care scenario, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View points out.

On the flip side, with respect to the administration of PDD, you know, we have this money that the government is kicking out the door. More power to you. Thank you for doing it. It's good. I

approve of this money that's going out there to help ever so slightly ameliorate the gross wage gap that exists with respect to people that work on the front line and most of these nonprofit agencies providing these important social services. The problem is that we are not consistently auditing whether that money is actually going to the employee.

I asked about this last year, and I was told: "Oh, no, no. We know for sure it's going to the employees." But I have then since spoken with a number of different service providers and then spoke to a different minister about it. In fact, it appears to me that we are not consistently auditing whether the employees are actually getting this money and that that varies from organization to organization to organization whether or not that wage increase actually went to the employees. In fact, the Disability Workers Association did a survey which suggested that almost half of their members did not receive the full increase in their salary that was to have been reflected by that budget increase. While the money being committed to that project is a good thing, the administration and the follow-up does not appear to be happening, and that is a problem.

Madam Chair, this is a matter that I think would be of some interest to you, which is, you know, going back to this issue: what would we spend the money on if we had a proper revenue collection system?

The other issue, of course, is the Michener Centre. We have no business closing Michener Centre right now. We have no business throwing those vulnerable, vulnerable Albertans out on the street or into whatever inappropriate, quasi-long-term care setting may be found for them. We have no business disrupting their lives at this late time in their lives, when they are so incredibly fragile. We have no business breaking the promise that was made originally to the families of these vulnerable, vulnerable Albertans. Yeah, it's going to cost the government a little bit more money to keep the Michener Centre open until everybody has aged out of that centre, but that is the humane thing to do.

The fact that it was the humane thing to do is what underlay the original promise not to force people out. It's the departure and the disconnect between this government's current leadership and the notion of what is the humane thing to do which is driving this decision. That's one of the things that I would absolutely correct if, you know, we were trying to figure out what to do with the money that came from a proper and fair taxation system. Let me tell you: that's something that goes without saying.

Those are a few of the issues and concerns that I have with this budget. It's not exhaustive, but I feel that I have managed to touch on some of those that are most important to my critic areas. I'm certain, of course, that the government will come – well, I guess they can't even procedurally come rushing in with amendments. Anyway, this is another number of points about why I don't think it is in the best interests of Albertans for us to support this budget.

Thank you.

8:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I know I'm speaking again on the appropriation bill, Bill 8. While the hon. member was talking, it brought to mind many things that, in my view, Alberta, with a proper revenue stream, could be doing a lot better. Primarily my comments are going to be based around our education system, our K through 12 education system, and where we've seen it go since the baseline year of '08-09, when we

actually had a reckoning of sorts, where we recognized that we would no longer be having predictable, sustainable funding to go forward given our revenue streams.

I'll go back to that time. That was the year we started running deficit budgets. Now we've run six consecutive deficit budgets. Although the government goes to great pains to say that this is a balanced budget, I think anyone who looks at it under the auspices of the old accounting mechanism can clearly see that this is a deficit budget and that fundamentally the province is sinking into debt. That's a direct result of our fiscal structure or lack thereof.

But I'm getting sidetracked a little bit. Let me go back to the comments of what a reasonable fiscal structure would do to support kids in K through 12 education. If you look at the Alberta Teachers' Association, they put out a graph where since '08-09 we have added about 50,000 students to our K through 12 education system – that's just in the last three years – and in that time we have seen only an additional 120 or so teachers be hired into the system. Clearly and in no uncertain terms, if we had kept the same ratio of teachers to students that we had even in '08-09, we would be seeing far greater numbers of teachers hired in our classrooms. This would allow kids to get more help learning their reading, writing, and arithmetic, more time for them to spend being creative and to get the assistance they need, more time to look at problems of the world they're going to be solving or actually work to get them engaged in becoming learners instead of becoming just another number in a classroom.

These are real lives that we're affecting by our refusal to get a handle on our fiscal structure in some form or fashion in this province. It has real outcomes, where you have kids now in classrooms that are bursting at the seams. You know, if you look at the numbers that are coming in, they're going up, up, and up throughout our system. Clearly, this does not lead to optimal learning conditions for our students. That's a direct result of us not getting a handle on our fiscal structure.

The other side of the education front in our K through 12 system is that we have not kept up with the building of schools in this province. Even with the promise of 50 schools and 70 modernizations in the last election, even if that promise were able to be fulfilled, with the addition of students coming into this province, like I've said, at the rate of 50,000 in the past three years – we're going to add 50,000 or more in the next three – with the numbers we come up with, we'd actually need approximately 86 new schools if we were going to keep up with population growth in this province. That's 86 schools from where we were at the last election to where we need to be by 2016. Clearly, although the hon. Infrastructure minister begs to differ with me on this point, I see no possible way that these schools can be built by 2016.

Simply put, here we are at – what is it? – April 2014, and there are no shovels in the ground, in fact, no concrete plans in place, no money transferred to various boards, no finalization of who's going to be building schools, what mechanism the schools are going to be built by, and the like. For us to think in Alberta at this time that schools are going to be built in a year and a half, well, I just don't think so. I just find it . . .

Dr. Swann: Are you skeptical?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. I'm more than skeptical. You know, to have these 50 schools built is a virtual impossibility. If we had a reasonable revenue system in this province, we would have been able immediately after the 2012 election to move to building those schools, you know, move to actually getting schools in neighbourhoods where kids live. That would be something. It would eliminate busing times. It would eliminate all sorts of

things. It would encourage kids to be healthier because they wouldn't have to ride on the bus. You'd be dealing with a whole host of problems and a whole host of things that kids and communities need that would make Alberta truly a great place to live. It'd be more than just a place to have a job on Monday morning. It'd be a place where you could have a school in your neighbourhood. Those are real, tangible things that we are missing here at this time.

It's not like we're overtaxed. I pointed out that, you know, by and large, we're the lowest taxed jurisdiction by a country mile. I think at this point in time we should learn that contributing to the public purse allows us to have that sense of community, allows us to have our kids educated in a reasonable fashion, allows our kids to have schools in neighbourhoods where they live. These are real things that are missing in our education system.

I know I brought up earlier another component of that, not having a reasonable fiscal structure. This government wasn't able to follow through on the former Premier's promise of delivering kindergarten. You know, in my view, this is a thing that our children are missing out on as a result of us not having a reasonable, fixed fiscal structure. I'm not even going to get into saving some of this oil wealth for the future. That's important too, but really we've got to get a handle where conservatives in this province understand that a conservative philosophy is paying for what you use in taxes. I for the life of me don't understand how two right-wing parties don't get that, that that is somehow unreasonable. Instead they believe that spending all the oil wealth in one generation is somehow fiscally prudent. It's just fiscal nonsense, Madam Chair. It's the furthest thing – it's folly, and we still haven't learned that at this stage.

By pointing out those examples in our education system, there are real people. We're impacting kids' futures. I've got to keep talking here because I forgot about this. You know, Madam Chair, probably in Red Deer you have a great deal of kids coming to this province, because their parents do jobs in our oil and gas industry, from a great many jurisdictions throughout the world. English is their second language, and over the course of the last three years we've gone from funding kids as English language learners from seven years to five years. This is clearly not in their best interests for the long run.

9:00

As a result of us not being able to follow through on that, on getting kids the ability to best learn English as well as they can at a very difficult time – you know, all the research indicates that it's very difficult to learn a second language when you move past your fourth birthday to a new country and to be able to get up to developing a depth of vocabulary necessary to fully achieve your full potential. The evidence is clear on this, but at least when we had seven years, we were actually trying to do the best we could. I think the move back to five years of funding for English language learning sets us up for a generation now of us having kids, who will then be adults, who will not be succeeding as well as they could be.

Dr. Swann: Or contributing.

Mr. Hehr: Or contributing. You're right. It's going to have problems later down the line.

Again, thank you, Madam Chair. This allowed me to get up and show, again, what a reasonable fiscal structure would allow us to do. It would allow us to live better today as well as, hopefully, save some oil wealth for the future, when, sure enough, the world has moved on.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I was speaking earlier about the fundamental roles of government, and I skipped over one that I feel badly about because it's a pretty critical one that others have commented on. I commented on the role of government being to provide leadership through fair laws, services, oversight, and a stable resource base, to protect people and the environment for the long term. In doing so, I described stewardship of resources and a longer term energy future. I talked about a fair revenue stream to provide stable, consistent funding for our essential services and vulnerable populations. I talked about protecting the environment, and I talked about infrastructure and public services. I neglected to mention the role of providing a funding situation that deals with the large and growing economic disparity in our province.

It's no news, I don't think, to anybody here that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and that this is a recipe for not only increasing problems in our economy because more and more people are not contributing as they could and are actually draining the system, but it creates a failure of our humanity, let me say, a failure to help those who should be reaching their potential, the resources and the opportunities to meet that potential.

I'm speaking to some extent about poverty and child poverty, very specifically. It distresses me to no end that this government is unwilling to define poverty, especially child poverty, and therefore refuses to hold themselves accountable for failing to meet any indicators of progress in reducing child poverty. A sustainable economic plan, a budget that is worthy of the term "budget," a government that's worthy of the term "leadership" would not be ignoring the growing poverty, the income gap, the growing challenges we're seeing in learning problems, social problems, mental health problems in children, many of which are eminently preventable. If there's anything that characterizes this government, it's penny wise, pound foolish. They are not willing to look at the huge costs of ignoring poverty and inequity in this province.

The report a year ago from the poverty reduction strategy in Calgary, called the cost of poverty, very realistically looked at numbers in relation to poverty in general and costed it out at \$7 billion a year. That's about a fifth of our budget, and that is not only economic loss; it is human potential loss. We are condemning families to return to the cycle of poverty. By the lack of vision and the lack of investment in prevention we are contributing to massive future costs and loss of human potential.

The Perry preschool study of 30 years ago. Cheryl Perry was a great child researcher out of the U.S., who followed children, especially disadvantaged children, for 30 years and showed very persuasively that an investment of \$1 in childhood in a disadvantaged family returns \$7 over the course of 30 years in terms of learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, behavioural problems, criminal justice issues, joblessness, employment problems, mental health issues.

It is a travesty of leadership when a government refuses to invest in its children. We continue to see growing numbers of children, up to 91,000 children, now living in poverty and a government that refuses to address it. They made some nominal promises in the 2012 leadership that seem to have fallen by the wayside. No sign of their commitment to child poverty in this budget and a clear default on their commitment to their oft-used phrase of "children first." It's beyond reproachable that this government continues to say that children are first and watch on

the sidelines as growing numbers of children are faced with not only intellectual disabilities but economic loss to our society.

Poverty costs through other dimensions when we don't invest, and this budget itself fails to address prevention in other areas of life as well. I'm most familiar, of course, Madam Chair, with the health care system, where we have made no significant improvements in our investments in prevention and wellness. A particular group, chronic disease prevention, and the wellness foundation proposal that's been on the table for at least two years continues to wither, and this government continues to find ways to ignore what is a fundamental commitment of any advanced government, and that is investment in primary prevention.

We know, for example, that early intervention in mental health challenges in families and in children, in indications of behavioural problems and addictions can yield tremendous, cost-effective results. Basic elements of reducing risk in people involve not only education but community capacity development and recognizing that education is a foundation of prevention, not only formal education but life skills and helping young people and, especially, new Canadians who are struggling with new culture and new challenges and new language and must have a serious investment in their development. Education has to be foundational for that.

Again, as my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo indicated, a sustained investment in English as a second language and work with individuals who are still struggling to find their way in life, their career path, their language skills, whatever it is, is worth so much more when this is clearly a commitment to getting them to a particular level of functioning, where they can become self-sufficient. They can contribute not only in their career but also in their tax contributions.

9:10

Again, it's a surprise that after this many years in government we see an actual default again. With a recognition that with the resources we have and the security we have as a province, now is the time to invest in prevention. There are huge payoffs. Monetary, human potential, tax, long-term community well-being, criminal justice system, mental health issues: all of these things benefit when we bring in the revenues and distribute them in a way that will maximize our human potential.

That's all I needed to add, Madam Chair. This is a budget that really is just holding the line, continuing a tradition of short-term thinking, an emphasis on corporate advantage, minimal savings, and a lack of vision for a future that is going to be very different than the present in terms of energy, in terms of our environmental challenges, and in terms of the lost human potential that we continue to ignore in budgets such as this.

I'll take my seat and let someone else speak to this budget, which I'm sure the government is now seeing is unacceptable and will also vote against themselves.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and continue where I left off earlier. I know that all the members of the House were quite disappointed when the bells went at 6 o'clock and I had to finish early. I'm sure they're all very excited to hear what I have to say. Part of what I have to say actually fits with where I was.

With this budget I think it's disappointing for a number of reasons. There's been some talk about some of the programs and services that have been cut, the PC government's inaction on eliminating child poverty, doing next to nothing, nothing in this budget for that. We're already coming up to the halfway point. It just seems like this will be another broken promise, something that we've become too familiar with with this PC government ruling the province.

One of the areas that has been starved for decades, Madam Chair, is the infrastructure around the province. You know, when I talk about infrastructure, I talk about the long-term maintenance, that is often deferred. In fact, in budget estimates the Minister of Infrastructure made a comment about how maintenance is always the first thing that gets taken off the table because you can continually defer it. It's the easiest thing to defer. However, I would argue that you might be able to defer it quite easily in one given year, but you continue to do that, and you're actually paying more in the long run. Our friends over in Edmonton public have forecasted I believe a billion dollar deficit by 2025 – does that sound accurate? – which is absolutely absurd.

Where I was tonight was listening to some very frustrated parents in a situation where they have to accept three school closures in order to get one new school in their mature neighbourhood. [interjection] I'm not quite sure why the member was banging on his desk.

Mr. Eggen: He was banging his head against the desk.

Mr. Bilous: Ah, okay. I was going to say that the parents aren't necessarily excited about school closures.

But the point of it is that schools should be invested in. They are a hub of the community, and it's quite frustrating that communities are being forced, especially in mature neighbourhoods, to accept closures. I find it quite frustrating.

Of course, everyone loves shiny new schools with the fanciest of equipment. But let me tell you that some of the points that the parents brought up were very, very significant. I mean, the fact that in some of these older schools they already have the Smart boards and the technology, so questions are about: what are the new bells and whistles that will come with the new school? I can tell you, Madam Chair, that some of the most passionate speeches were about the value of small community schools, of parents being able to allow their kids to walk to school, knowing their neighbours, knowing the teachers, knowing all the kids in the school, all of them being on a first-name basis, kids not having to spend hours on a bus every day going to and from their school. The frustration is that – well, let me first say that one of the parents asked: was it the Edmonton public school board that decided that three schools needed to close in order to get one new one? Gladly I responded, and the answer, quite frankly, was: no, it wasn't the school board; this is a decision by this PC government and an arbitrary one at that. I asked the Education minister where the 3 to 1 ratio came from. Why not 1 to 1? Why not 2 to 1? Why 3 to 1? So a very valid question.

Again, going right back to this bill and to this budget, Madam Chair, this year's budget is not increasing as far as Education goes. I mean, it's increasing to cover only population and inflation, and I don't even know if it covers that much. As I pointed out earlier, last month in our fabulous province here the inflation and population numbers – of course, I'm going to struggle to find it right now. The inflation rate in March surged to 3.9 per cent. That's almost double the Canadian inflation rate and the highest of any other province in this country. So a hold-the-

line budget is really a budget that is cutting. It's cutting into core services that Albertans depend upon.

You know, it makes me sad, the thought of any school having to close. I can appreciate looking at creative ways of keeping schools open, but, again, when you defer maintenance for years and years and decades and then claim that Alberta is debt free, I mean, really, all you've done is taken the numbers off your books. Just take a look at the integrity of our schools, our hospitals, our roads, our bridges. I believe it was last fall that the Auditor General did an audit on the integrity of our bridges. It was appalling, Madam Chair, the fact that we don't even know the condition of about a third of our bridges around the province. We don't know how the inspections were done. Most of the inspections were done by inspectors who weren't even licensed. We don't know if they spent two minutes on a bridge or 24 hours.

I mean, this kind of data is crucial if we and Albertans are to have faith and trust that the infrastructure in this province is up to code, is up to standard, and is going to be there for them. We saw what happened in Montreal when one of their bridges collapsed. God forbid that we experience something similar here in Alberta. The scary part, Madam Chair, again, is that as long as we continue to defer maintenance, especially in the crucial areas, it is possible that something like what happened in Montreal could happen here.

You know, my colleague from Edmonton-Calder and I were talking in the past few weeks about the state of many of the seniors' facilities in this province and the fact of the tragedy that struck in Quebec, where a seniors' home went up in flames. Questions we were asking: do our seniors' homes here in Alberta have the appropriate systems in place, and do they have sprinklers? Again, months ago I was assured by a minister that \$31 million last year was earmarked for seniors' homes modernizations. You know, the sad truth, Madam Chair, is that a fraction, a pittance, of that \$31 million actually went toward retrofitting seniors' homes with sprinkler systems. So the outcome is that we have many seniors around this province in unsafe homes should an emergency erupt. I mean, this government should be ashamed, again, living in the province that we do, putting the lives of seniors, the very folks who built this province, at risk and in jeopardy because either this government is too cheap to invest in their lives and their safety or they're just incompetent, you know. Or is it oversight?

9:20

In this year's budget we've been calling for dollars earmarked specifically to ensure that our seniors' residences have sprinkler systems. I mean, the NDP was calling for flashing strobes as well should an emergency occur. There are many seniors who are either hard of hearing or cannot hear, so your traditional alarm bells wouldn't actually alert them to an emergency when it's happening.

You know, Madam Chair, it truly is disappointing, especially when you talk to seniors. They're struggling to make ends meet. It seems like they're falling further and further behind. Again, Alberta leads the country in inflation. Staying on the seniors issue, the problem is that their fixed incomes are not rising at the pace of inflation and population growth, so they are sliding backwards. The purchasing power of their dollar is shrinking daily. There should have been dollars in this budget earmarked for that, and we should ensure that we're taking care of our seniors.

You know, on that note, we've got a significant number of folks who are retiring, who are becoming seniors, and who are going to be in need of beds and facilities. There is a serious shortage in this province. We've got many seniors tying up beds in hospitals because there simply aren't available accommodations for them

either in their community or anywhere. Obviously, Madam Chair, you understand that what that does is that it backs up even further a system that's already backed up.

Again, as I pointed out earlier with this budget, on the one hand the government will say: "Oh, no. We need to tighten our belts. We need to cut back on spending. We can't work to eliminate child poverty, we can't help our seniors to afford to live in this province, we cannot help our young people go to postsecondary, but we can afford expensive flights or penthouse suites or corporate welfare for some of the largest multinationals that are making significant profits every quarter."

I'd like to remind the House that the Alberta NDP was the only party during the 2012 election that had in our platform a reduction in the small-business tax. We would have reduced it by a third. We understand that small businesses really are what drive the Alberta economy. But, again, instead of helping out the little guy, this government is interested in returning the favour of the bigger corporations, the ones that help them get elected election after election. You know, it's quite frustrating.

Albertans are asking: why is this the case? Why are we seeing cuts to PDD? Why aren't we seeing a stronger investment in education, in health care, in the services that many Albertans need? Quite frankly, Madam Chair, I shake my head and say: you know, this province has a \$43 billion yearly budget. We're told that we can't afford one thing, but, hey, there's more than a billion dollars for an unproven, unfounded technology: carbon capture and storage. We've got a billion to throw there. But you want a new seniors' home? Sorry. We want to reduce our class sizes: "No, no, no. You've got to deal with more students in the classroom." Albertans, quite frankly, are quite tired, and they don't believe what this government is trying to sell. They're not buying anymore.

Again, government should respond to the citizens and not the other way around. I think it's quite clear that this government is completely out of touch with Albertans, with Albertans' priorities. So again the tale of two Albertas continues, where there's one set of standards for 5 per cent – maybe 5 per cent is too high – maybe for 3 per cent of the Alberta population, and the other 97 per cent have to deal with less and make their dollar stretch even further.

Madam Chair, you know, the government could and should be doing much more. I look forward to hearing what some of my colleagues have to say on the budget and possibly having the opportunity to share a few more of my thoughts.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: I move that we rise and report, Madam Chair. [interjections]

Mr. Campbell: Point of clarification, Madam Chair. If we're not allowed to rise and report, then we'll let the Member for Edmonton-Calder speak, and then we'll finish.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: All right. Well, that's great. You know, in the spirit of that decision, I'm going to take off my jacket. I wanted to show my new shirt that I got as well. Very expensive.

Ms Notley: Was it very expensive?

Mr. Eggen: It was very expensive, yes.

Ms Notley: Was it like \$40,000?

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. It's not that expensive.

You know, we always talk about different areas of spending and so forth, but I think it's important for us to recognize as well the importance and the opportunity that we have before us here to actually balance this budget. We don't have many opportunities like this. We've just toured around the province, the Alberta New Democrats, and from north to south and east to west we found that the economy, lo and behold, in each of these places is doing very well, thank you very much. The population is growing very well, too. So what's the problem with balancing the budget?

We know as well that there's lots of wasteful spending that we see inside this budget, and there are ways by which we can adjust the revenue to make it all come out to zero. I think that in a modern, industrial society, where we are, in fact, one of the world's leading energy producers, we have a responsibility to balance the budget when we can. I mean, you're not always able to do that, right? Certainly, you don't do it at the expense of the essential services which we are responsible for. But, you know, considering everything here in 2014 – take a look around the world – we have a capacity to actually balance the budget or approach balancing the budget here in the province of Alberta. I just wanted to bring that up. We often lend so much of that space over to other people talking about balanced budgets and so forth. We used to even have a law about balancing the budget here. I seem to recall that. I don't know what happened to that law.

9:30

You know, the other side of it, too, is where we, I think, don't apply a very careful eye, right? You guys are supposed to be doing this – what is it? – continuous, revolutionary budget making. Is that what it's called? No. It's results-based budgeting. That's what it is – right? – where you just keep on budgeting till the cows come home, and the cows come back and you're still budgeting.

[Mr. Jeneroux in the chair]

I mean, how the heck did you miss that you didn't balance the budget during that continuous, revolutionary process that you seemed to engage in over there? I mean, really. How did you miss, for example, all of this crazy spending in Alberta Health Services? I mean, that's where 40 per cent of our budget goes. Yes, we need to make investments in health care, but you have to do it smart, right? This whole business about giving these wild bonuses to executives and creating this culture of entitlement there, you know, is not just bad politics and is not just bad management, but you actually end up wasting money as well as a result of doing so, and you can't trace it. It's very important to have auditing procedures in place so that you know where the money is going and whether or not you're meeting your goals. Really, there's a flip side to it, and that is that we should and can balance budgets here in the province of Alberta.

You know, I had a friend visit me from England. He is from here originally, but he said: the simple fact from the outside looking in that (a) you do not take your nonrenewable resources, your revenue, and invest it in a renewable energy economy and (b) the fact that you don't balance your budget in the province of Alberta are inexcusable administrative and political oversights that a government should pay for. And I said: "Well, you know what? This time, my friend, I think the government really is going to pay for this. For sure. We just have to wait for the next election."

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

You know, it's just a good reminder, right? We always used to have the PCs across the way dancing in front of us, jumping up and down and doing all of these sort of calisthenics about how they balanced the budget and they have a law and la-di-da. Well, they sure as heck don't do that now. You know why? Because they don't collect the revenue that they're supposed to, and they don't have a finger on where the best investment is and the best return on investment is, right? You know, if you make an investment in human capital by investing in young people and education, by investing in preventive medicine and investing in ways by which people could be secure for the future with their pensions and so forth, then you get the value-added from one dollar of public expenditure that ends up as a \$7 or \$14 investment in the future, like when you're talking about early childhood education and so forth.

You know, I just go back to this idea that we misuse language so often in this Chamber, right? People talk about choice, and the subtext of choice here so often is really choosing that people just end up not getting the public services that they need. Yeah, sure. Rich people can choose to go to a private school or to a private hospital or so forth, but there are not very many people that can actually do that. So the choice is really no choice if you're the vast majority of Albertans, who live in a place where we make the best benefit from investing in a public institution that we all own together, that social investment in the public interest. That's what I got a leg up on, that's what my family got a leg up on, and I sure as heck am not going to pull that out from the next generation of people who could use that opportunity to make a good life, a secure life for themselves and for their families here.

So let's try to remember that. Let's remember those first principles when we try to do the next budget. I know the next budget will be a lot closer to or maybe right before an election, so that always gets everybody all excited about spending more money. But let's collect the money so that (a) we balance the budget on revenues that we do have, that we just let slip through our fingers like sand right now, and (b) that we make the proper investment in the public service, right?

You know, when I look at this budget, Bill 8, there's an inordinate amount of money that comes from very peculiar places like lotteries, say, for example. While the lotteries have provided lots of good funding for community projects and stuff like that, I can't help but think it's a bit of a scam – right? – because here we are going to these casinos when we volunteer for our community leagues or soccer teams and whatever, and we just kind of stand there while they run the casino themselves. I mean, it feels like we're just the front people for a casino operation, like we're running a Las Vegas thing here but that, oh, yeah; we're going to get mom and dad to go down and watch them count the money for eight hours.

Now they want to move that process, some of the tables and so forth, and want to have them open to 4 o'clock in the morning – right? – which is a huge blow to the regular folks that have to go and, you know, watch the people play casino and count the money and all of that kind of thing. I mean, that whole idea of using community – if we need the money for our community leagues and so forth, let's just distribute it in an equitable way and not go through this facade of watching people gamble and watching people ruin their lives on the VLTs – right? – and then collect the money at 4:30 in the morning and lose all of that sleep over it.

I mean, really, that's a part of this bill, again, that I find objectionable, quite frankly. It's the inordinate amount of revenue that we are required to bring in through our lotteries to run basic services. The whole thing just doesn't make sense to me, right? Really, if you attach the lottery money to health care and mental

health, then you've got this cycle and circle going on just like, you know, the way we use taxation for cigarettes, right? People go through the health care system and they have a mental health problem that manifests itself in VLTs, and then around and around we go, right? What kind of racket is that, Madam Chair, really? So I think we could do a lot better with that.

You know, there are places that just pop out at me, and I just wanted to get up and make some quick mention of this. I know that the people of Alberta want us to pass a responsible budget, and I certainly want to exercise that responsibility in the best possible way. I'm particularly annoyed about this whole pension thing. I just find it unbelievable that we would actually do that. I mean, sure, we can reform and build and strengthen our public pensions and everyone's pensions over time. Certainly, there are lots of people that don't even have proper pensions in this province, Madam Chair, and that's a problem, right? But you don't do it by attacking other pensions. I mean, that's just so crazy, right? I think that we should put more money into the mental health part of our health care thing because, obviously, we're seeing some exhibitions of abhorrent behaviour right here in this Chamber when we're talking about these pensions, and I don't like that at all.

Anyway, that's just a couple of points that I wanted to bring up, Madam Chair, that (a) let's go back to brass tacks and talk about the way that I balance my budget in my family and that we make sure that we cover the bases and we look after health care and the basic services that we need in our family. I know that that's not something that you directly translate to 4 million people and \$43 billion, but in the province of Alberta the fact that we don't balance our budget here in 2014 I find quite embarrassing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that wish to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm quite pleased to rise and continue with my thoughts on this budget, and I'm thankful how attentive the members are this evening. I'm going to start with or go back to what I spoke a little bit about earlier, where I was at a meeting where communities are forced to have to accept a potential school closure in their community in order to get a new school.

You know, something that I didn't touch on earlier, that is really important, I think, was a motion that was made in here, Madam Chair. But the discussion needs to take place as far as the fact that when a new school is built, there's nothing requiring the builder, the developers to do anything whatsoever when it comes to playgrounds or to ensuring that kids have that space. Something that was raised this evening is that wherever this new school happens to go, whether it's in the Coronation area or the Highlands area or the Beverly area, would this new school get a playground, or are parents on the hook for having to fund raise for that?

9:40

Again, playgrounds aren't cheap, Madam Chair, even to refurbish an existing playground. It's a valid question and something that, again, the Alberta NDP would support. You know, there are many creative ways to levy dollars to ensure that there is a space for children. Again this an example where the government can say: well, it will add that much more to the price tag. Yes, it would be an additional cost to the government and to taxpayers, but there is a case to be made for the value of exercise and play

and how that helps children in their development, learning about co-operation and working with each other, learning how to be a good – what’s the word I’m looking for? If you lose at a game, but you lose with integrity, you can say: yes, I lost, but I’m a good sport about it.

There are the health benefits of ensuring that our kids are getting as much exercise as they need. I believe that in our province the challenge of obesity is on the rise. Again, you know, part of the way to combat that, Madam Chair, obviously, is ensuring that kids get enough exercise.

The issue of playgrounds is one that was brought up in estimates. I did follow up because it was a private member’s motion that was passed here in the House, Motion 516. I mean this motion couldn’t be any softer, you know, as far as exploring funding for basic site prep for playgrounds for new schools and a very small ask. I mean, I’m surprised the other side of the House actually passed it, but I think it was a step in the right direction. I’d like to see much more than that. But the question, Madam Chair, that I asked in estimates was: where are we on this motion, and is this happening? Now, you can probably guess what the answer was because, really, it’s still under discussion, and there hasn’t been much movement on this whatsoever. That’s disappointing.

I talked about deferred maintenance, which is a significant challenge. Again, as long as this government continues to defer maintenance on our infrastructure, it’s going to get to the point where it’s past repair, which is what’s happening already. Now we’re looking at forcing closures, whether it’s schools, hospitals, roads. Again, Madam Chair, it’s more cost efficient and less expensive if you have ongoing maintenance. As any homeowner in the House or in the province will know, investing in your home . . .

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. Bilous: Oh, it’s absolutely relevant. We’re talking about investing so that that way you’re not putting it off and putting it off to the point that it just gets so expensive to repair that you just have to close it.

Now, there are some that would say that that’s this government’s intention, that basically you starve a system to the point where you can then make the case that, well, it’s just more economical or cheaper just to shut it down altogether. I think it’s ridiculous that we’re not investing in our core infrastructure and that we haven’t been investing adequately, I would argue, for more than 20 years. Again, you know, this hold-the-line budget means that we’re sliding backwards further and further year by year.

One of the areas that there’s been little to no movement on is full-day kindergarten. Again, this was something that was promised, but as we’ve come to learn, when this PC government makes a promise, don’t hold your breath. As we see, the optional full-day kindergarten programs are not province-wide, do not exist. It needs to be noted here, Madam Chair, that schools that do offer full-day K are actually taking money out of their operating budget that could be used for specialists or to have more staff or smaller class sizes. I mean, there is a trade-off. You know, hats off to the schools that recognize the need in their communities for a full-day kindergarten. However, it’s shameful that it’s not being funded by this PC government and that they’re pulling money out of maintenance, out of wherever they can find it. So that’s frustrating.

Modernizations. I mean, that’s such an interesting one because the boards have some schools that have been on a wish list for over five years. In fact, the Calgary board of education has had

numerous schools that are in desperate need of modernizations, and year after year they keep getting passed over by this government. Again, you know, it’s a question that’s often been asked. How is it decided which schools get chosen or which areas get new schools as others are forced to wait?

The issue of portables, Madam Chair. In Edmonton here – and I’ll speak to that as an Edmonton MLA – Edmonton public only received 10 out of the 22 modulars that they were asking for. Now, again, they are depleting any reserves that they have in order to pay for them. It should be noted as well for members who aren’t aware of this that even when the province funds a portable, it’s the board that has to pay for the – connection is not the right word here . . .

An Hon. Member: Set-up.

Mr. Bilous: . . . set-up of the portable and making it functional, which is a significant cost, again, that the school board is having to bear.

Let’s see what else. You know, when we’re talking about building schools, the discussion of whether it’s built in-house or it’s shopped around, I find, is an interesting one. Since I’ve been elected, this government has gotten up and waxed about how great P3s are and, you know, how they are God’s gift to schools, yet we’ve got an example in this province where the bid was tendered and, really, there was only one company that put in a bid to build 19 schools. I talked to the minister about this, that, well, that shoots one hole in the whole argument that competition will drive the price down. When you only have one bidder, there is no competition.

Again, I find it interesting that the CBE, the Calgary board of education, got tired of waiting for this knuckle-dragging government and decided to build in-house and said: “You know what? We can do it more efficiently and cheaper than what the government can do.” They’ve asked for themselves to build in-house, which, again, is very interesting.

Again, you know, I have concerns. I’ve talked to both the Infrastructure minister and the Education minister. They’re very great at promising things, but the delivery seems to be another question when we’ve got, you know, the promise of 50 new schools and 70 modernizations, yet shovels haven’t hit the ground, but they’re supposed to be open by the fall of 2016. Now, I don’t want to be a pessimist, Madam Chair, but when you look at how long it takes a new school to open its doors from time of design or initial tendering of design, you know, that’s more like – what is it? – a three- to five-year window. There are only two years left, and a shovel hasn’t hit the ground. Again, there is such a need for new schools.

I find it fascinating – and I might have mentioned this the other day, Madam Chair. When I was up in Fort McMurray, I was meeting with the board and the superintendent up there. You know, you look at the birth rate up in Wood Buffalo, and it’s astonishing that they’ve got on average 1,500 births per year. Now, again, when you do the math, how many schools are going to be required when these newborns get to the school age? I mean, it’s unbelievable. The superintendent told me that they would need two new schools every year as long as the birth rate keeps that pace. That area has lots of young families. In fact, I think it’s the fastest growing municipality with young people or has the youngest demographic of folks.

9:50

Again, they’re in desperate need and quite frustrated with this government, and rightly so, looking at the fact that they really are

one of the main drivers of Alberta's economy, the economic hub or driver, I should say, of the province. The fact that they are desperate for infrastructure really begs the question: you know, does this PC government appreciate the constraints and challenges that are being placed on the area of Wood Buffalo, not to mention the fact that you've got the highest cost of living anywhere in the province? Rents are ridiculous. I mean, I'm not sure how people afford to live there. You've got lots of folks who are not working directly in the oil patch. You've got nurses, and you've got teachers, and you've got bus drivers, and you've got maintenance and repair and janitorial staff that are not making \$150,000, \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000 a year. How are they keeping up and not falling further and further behind? It's a great question. You know, it seems like this government is reluctant to acknowledge it and even more reluctant to do something to do about that, Madam Chair.

I'll jump back over to infrastructure here because my colleague from Edmonton-Calder has revealed through FOIPs over the last couple of weeks a lot of really shocking and embarrassing realities or discoveries of what's going on at the Misericordia. I mean, there are parts of the hospital that are unsafe. You've got staff that don't even want to work in the facility. It's dangerous. You've got water, when it rains, leaking onto electrical panels. I mean, it's actually quite shameful that that hospital has been allowed to deteriorate to the point that it's at, and again my point is going back to deferred maintenance. The government is saying, I believe, that they were throwing a handful, several million, maybe even \$19 million – I'm not sure if that was the number that was quoted – at the Misericordia. Again, you know, had there been ongoing upkeep, I would love to know how much smaller that number would be and, in fact, if we never would have let it get to the state that it's in.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that one of my frustrations is that it seems that this PC government only acts when it's either shamed into doing the right thing or when a disaster strikes. Again, look at the flooding last June. You know, members from this side of the House had been calling for years to update the flood mapping, to protect communities as much as possible. We even had a report back in 2006, the Groeneveld report, that raised lots of flags. I believe it was myself that raised the point that the federal government had dollars for provinces to invest in flood mitigation, and this government sat on its hands and did nothing, and they claim that there was not enough time. Well, you tell me how B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba could all get it together and get the application in, yet somehow Alberta was sleeping at the wheel or maybe not even at the picnic. I don't know where they were. It's frustrating, and I can imagine how frustrated the folks who were affected by the floods are.

You know, what are we doing to prevent future tragedies and travesties from happening in this province? Again, I see a government not investing enough, moving very slowly on infrastructure that's quite critical. You know what? Even the most fiscally conservative members would recognize that if you can put dollars into the preventative side, you will save money rather than, you know, waiting for an emergency or a travesty and having a knee-jerk reaction and suddenly having to spend three times, five times, 10 times the amount. I really don't understand their logic, so I'm happy to hear that members from that side also don't understand their own logic and are questioning the front bench.

Madam Chair, I think that this budget for a myriad of reasons is disappointing. I think many Albertans are disappointed with it, again scratching their heads: how is there money for carbon capture and storage, money for expensive junkets, flights, travel plans for the government, yet for your working Albertans . . .

Mr. Mason: Foreign offices.

Mr. Bilous: And foreign offices. That's a very valid point. Thank you. I mean, the fact that you've got – let's see here. Oh, wait. There's money in the budget to open three new international offices.

Mr. Eggen: Where?

Mr. Bilous: In Brazil, in California, and in China. Wow. It's amazing that Alberta needs more offices in other countries – I didn't know Alberta was a country – yet there isn't money in the budget to ensure that grandma doesn't have to wait for weeks or months for much-needed surgery. You know, public-sector workers are being attacked. I mean, they give their lives in service to their province, and the province and this PC government return the favour by clawing back the pensions and what they're getting. I need to remind the members that their pensions are very, very modest. We're talking about \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year, you know, versus the cost of setting up one of these offices in one of these foreign countries. If I'm not mistaken, Madam Chair, I believe there are Canadian embassies that exist in these countries already.

Mr. Mason: But not in Rio de Janeiro.

Mr. Bilous: Well, that's very interesting. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood brought up where in Brazil that office is going. Now, if I recall, Rio is not the economic hub in Brazil. If I'm not mistaken, it's São Paulo. That really begs the question: how was Rio selected? I mean, I've been there. It's got a beautiful beach. It's very nice, but is that the best use of taxpayer dollars? One really has to question this government and its priorities.

I appreciate that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View talked at length about the cost of poverty and, again, the fact that this was yet another disappointment in this budget, the lack of dollars to address, you know, all the different facets of poverty and look at the root causes and not just throw Band-Aids on a problem. Again, looking at investments, I recall that when I was teaching in the inner city, the figure to put a young person through a year of school was something like . . .

The Deputy Chair: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to make a few comments with respect to the budget. You know, I was disappointed with the budget, and of course it's now Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014. I think that the budget was disappointing in a number of ways. I think that it's an example of a tale of two Albertas, one for the wealthy and the powerful and the friends and the people who are connected to the PC Party and another one for the rest of us. We want to continue to address that inequity that is built into the budget and is built into the ideology of the governing party for the last 42 years.

10:00

Despite the fact that we live in an incredibly prosperous province, I think the government is not treating people fairly. Opportunities in our province are endless, but I think that the majority of us need a better deal than this government seems prepared to do.

For example, the University of Alberta has specifically asked the minister to reinvest in their infrastructure maintenance program in order to avoid the catastrophic failure of some of their building systems. I just came from a school closure meeting in my constituency, where the government is offering one new school if

the school board is prepared to close three older schools. There are some outstanding schools there, where the government has refused to fund the capital priorities of the school board year after year after year, and it's meant that some of these schools – I was in Highlands junior high tonight, where my son actually attended years ago, a beautiful historic building, a mirror image of the Academy at King Edward on the south side if you know that. But it is in bad need of renovation and assistance. It has the original boilers, if you can believe it, hundred-year-old boilers still operating in that school. It has been fairly high on the public school board's capital priority list to do renovation and upgrading in that school, and it has been rejected year after year after year.

The school board has a problem. It's not just a question of enrolment; it's a question of being able to get the capital priorities that they see fit to be accepted by the government. The government over and over again when we were debating Motion 503 talked about how important it was to empower local school boards to make local decisions, and in that case it was a way for the government to avoid taking responsibility for defeating 503. But when it comes to something where the school board really should have control and really have a say – that is to say over their capital and their maintenance budgets – the province overrules them.

Madam Chair, I was actually quite pleased with the PC platform in the last election in certain respects [interjection] – wait for it, hon. member – particularly the commitment to end child poverty, and I think a lot of people who might not have otherwise voted for this government voted because they were supportive of that direction. We've now had three budgets and three throne speeches, and it's absolutely missing. It's absent. It's not present. It is completely not there. Now, if the commitment was to eliminate child poverty in five years, we're now on the third budget of five, and there are further cuts to programs that support people in poverty. I think that if we're talking about unkept promises, this is one of the biggest ones and perhaps the most disappointing.

You know, we've seen that the government wants to save money. I know that when it all boils down to the pension issue, it's not the unsustainability of the pensions that's bothering the government; it's how much they're having to pay as an employer in order to get the pensions back on track. The government is trying to save a little money by gutting the pension plans.

Why is it, hon. members, that every time the government wants to save a little money, it goes to the programs that support the middle class or low-income families? Why is it that every time they want to find economies, it's in those kind of programs: cuts to social programs, cuts to poverty programs, cuts to pensions for hundreds of thousands of Albertans? This is what I don't understand. Don't you realize that if you want to save some money, you shouldn't be going after the nickels and dimes in the budget? You should be looking at the hundred-dollar bills, and there are plenty of these in the budget.

I want to talk a little bit about the general situation with respect to the province's finances. I know that the Finance minister has heard me talk about this before, but more than 30 per cent of our program spending is funded by fluctuating royalty revenue because the actual revenue from taxation is not sufficient to support the programs that we have. That's not just a wild, socialist theory; that's an actual fact. We don't have enough taxation revenue in this province to pay for all of our program spending, and that's been the case year after year after year. So we draw heavily on the royalty revenue in order to pay for it.

Well, of course, we all know there are two problems with that. First of all, royalty revenue is extremely volatile. It goes up and down, and every time the price of oil drops, we're laying off

teachers and nurses or we're attacking a pension plan or we're doing something like that. That's not a desirable state of affairs.

The other problem, of course, is that these resources are nonrenewable, and they actually belong to all generations of Albertans. For us to steal from future generations of Albertans in order to spend this money on our own needs today is simply cheating future generations of Albertans. We need to, in my view, wean ourselves off that, and the key to that is to ensure that we have sufficient tax revenue to cover our program spending needs. Then we should be investing the royalty revenue in long-term funds, for example, like Norway's. I think that that's not only fair to future generations, but it requires us to pay for our own program expenditures. I think that that's something that the budget fails to address, something I've addressed many times in this House. My views are no surprise to the government members. I do think that it's important that we address that very important question.

I think there's been a lot said in this House about the waste and the culture of entitlement that afflicts this government. We've seen the extensive first-class flights, misuse of government aircraft, the sky palace. The sky palace is interesting. I know that the rules of the House say that you sometimes have to accept two different versions of the same story as being true at the same time. But I find it really interesting that two Infrastructure ministers claim to have cancelled the project. Now, we can't ask the former Minister of Infrastructure about his assertion that he did that because he's no longer the minister. So we have to accept the current Minister of Infrastructure's assertion that he did it but that also the other guy did it, too, and take that, I guess, at face value.

An Hon. Member: Very strange.

Mr. Mason: But it is indeed passing strange, Madam Chair, that there is an actual interdimensional time warp within the cabinet that allows this kind of thing to take place.

10:10

You know, the former minister was of course copied on the correspondence – and we saw it – by the Premier's executive assistant, who repeatedly copied him on all of the changes that he wanted to see as he was communicating and directing the architect directly. He would send copies to the former Minister of Infrastructure, who claims that he didn't see that, but he did know enough to cancel the project, which then had to be recancelled by the new Minister of Infrastructure. Oh, what a wonderful world it is in Alberta politics, Madam Chair. It is just ever so fascinating, with twists and turns in the plots worthy of a *Dr. Who* serial.

Now, I want to go to the wage freeze. This, I guess, is another example of what I was saying earlier, that when the government wants to save money, they don't save money by charging the oil companies more for the oil that belongs to us, that they take out of the ground, they don't charge the banks and their big financial contributors more, they don't charge the very wealthy Albertans who support them more, but they go after people who have modest incomes. They go after seniors. They go after the disabled community. They go after the poor. I just don't follow that.

I've learned to live with it, Madam Chair. Unfortunately, I have learned that, you know, you just can't argue these things out with conservatives. That's just how they see the world. Going back from the time when I lived in a certain house with a certain member of the government for a couple of years, I learned that it's just the way they are, just the way they think. It maybe doesn't make sense, but it's just who they are, and we have to love them despite that. We have to realize that they're human, too. They're,

you know, a bit weird. But they, unfortunately, have been running the province for 42 years, and we have to deal with that. So I think we will indeed deal with that perhaps in the next election. It's a very interesting thing.

Now, I know the Finance minister wants to talk about savings. He thinks that we should be doing some saving. I don't disagree with him. I don't disagree that we should be putting some money into savings. But when we have huge deficiencies that aren't funded because we don't have enough money, simply allocating some of an insufficient budget to savings at the expense of already starved programs, you know, is not the best way to go. I think the better way to go is to make sure you have enough revenue and then put your savings away. I think if we take a look at Norway, which has very significantly higher royalties and saves a much higher percentage of the royalties than we do here in Alberta, keeps the money in the fund instead of taking out the interest revenue and spending it, then builds it up to about . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(4) the vote on the appropriation bill that is currently before Committee of the Whole must be put. Accordingly, we'll go to the vote.

Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question: does the committee approve the following bill, Bill 8, Appropriation Act, 2014?

[Motion carried]

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

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Mr. Jeneroux: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 8.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10 Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. Anderson]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to Bill 10 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you so much. I am so pleased to be able to rise and begin debate on Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014. Let me begin by saying that we are unequivocally opposed to this bill, that it is a continuation of the bad work that the government is attempting to complete at the expense of Albertans through Bill 9. We just think it's a very bad idea.

Now, basically, what Bill 10 attempts to do is that it takes a bill that was passed a couple of years ago but not yet proclaimed and it further amends that bill, and it does so to make it super clear that

the government ultimately has the authority to allow single-payer employer pension plans to be converted from a defined benefit plan to a targeted benefit plan. Just for those folks out there who are listening to this debate, let's talk just a moment about the difference between a defined benefit plan and a targeted benefit plan.

A defined benefit plan is something that, well, you know, some of our friends over on the right, right, right side of the House there, in the Wildrose Party, have characterized as being gold-plated pensions and all that kind of stuff. That's not what they are. A defined benefit plan is a pension that somebody contributes to for years and years and decades and decades, to a factor of in most cases 85, and then they get a certain amount of money in their retirement. And what kind of outrageous amounts of money do they get in their retirement? Well, the average payout for the government public-sector defined pension plan right now is \$15,000 a year. Not so gold plated, but it is something that helps ensure that our seniors do not fall into the growing gap of poverty, which every expert in the country says that our seniors and our soon-to-become seniors are at risk of falling into.

The point of a defined benefit plan is that when you pay into it for a certain amount of time and your employer pays into it for a certain amount of time and you get to a certain age, then you can predict how much money you will have to retire on, and you can plan for that 10, 15, 20 years in advance. You know what, Madam Speaker? Many, many, many working people in this province do just that. They plan 15, 20, 25 years in advance about how they will be able to support their modest retirement in a way that doesn't put an outrageous burden on their children or others. That's what regular working Albertans do.

10:20

Now, we've talked about Bill 9 and the impact that has on the public-sector pension, but I think that we need to understand that with Bill 10, as much as it says "private sector," one of the plans under the act that this bill amends is ultimately to facilitate the movement of most public-sector pension plans to be covered under this other piece of legislation that is being addressed through Bill 10. It isn't just limited to private-sector plans, and, in fact, there are some public-sector plans that are already covered under this legislation. In fact, there are parts of this legislation that apply to all public-sector plans, so let's just not get too wrapped up that the two are not connected because they are connected.

What is the primary objective of this bill? Well, the original piece of legislation that this Legislature passed about a year and a half ago but has not yet proclaimed allowed for the administrator of the pension plan to basically decide that any plan that is not a targeted plan could reduce benefits to their employees should they be unable to pay the benefits. So that's what it used to say.

Now what we're doing in this is that we're making it super clear that if you have a specifically named and described defined benefit plan, then the employer can, if they jump through a few hoops, all of which will be written by these guys behind closed doors at some point in the future – who knows what those hoops will be. They'll probably be very big and very wide, big enough to drive many trucks through. Anyway, you stroll through those hoops, shall we say, and you get to convert the defined benefit plan to the targeted benefit plan. A targeted benefit is a close your eyes, cross your fingers, cross your toes, think about unicorns, and maybe wish upon a falling star sort of retirement planning strategy. That's what a targeted benefit plan is.

Mr. Lukaszuk: A fairy tale.

Ms Notley: It is kind of a fairy tale, Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, because it is not the plan that our cautious, our conservative, our hard-working, regular working Albertans started planning their retirement on 25 years ago. They didn't plan their retirement on the basis of this, you know, close your eyes and sprinkle fairy dust on their mutual fund kind of retirement planning strategy. No, they did not. They planned their retirement on the basis of a defined benefit plan with certain guarantees in the future, and this government wants employers to be able to convert those plans willy-nilly from a defined benefit to a targeted. I'm going to call it the pixie dust plan from here on in. We're going to call it the PC pixie dust retirement plan. That's what this bill wants to do. That's what this government wants to do with this bill.

Now, who does this apply to, and who should care? Well, basically, right now we have about 250,000 people who are covered under the act, which once proclaimed will apply to them, and then it will be amended by this bill. Of that 250,000 people about 138,000 of them currently enjoy the benefits of a defined benefit pension plan. Of those about half of them at least, give or take, are not represented by unions. So what the government will say is: "Well, you know what? Don't worry your pretty little head about our pixie dust plan because we won't convert it to a pixie dust plan unless both sponsors of the plan agree to it; i.e., the union and the employer."

Now, I actually have a problem with that, and I'll talk about that in a moment. The problem is that there are many, many people covered by this piece of legislation who are not represented by unions, so the mechanism for consulting with one of the partners for how you convert to their defined benefit, this is what my retirement is going to look like, plan to the pixie dust plan is unclear. How do we find out whether these guys are A-okay with having their defined benefit pension plan gutted? Well, this act is going to give all that authority to this fabulous, trustworthy cabinet which has a stellar record on consultation with vulnerable Albertans across the board and has brilliant trustworthiness ratings across the board. Well, needless to say . . .

Mr. Mason: Insert sarcasm here.

Ms Notley: Insert sarcasm here.

You can imagine that we don't have a lot of faith in this.

Mr. Mason: Well, otherwise people might read it and think she's saying this.

Ms Notley: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is concerned people might have thought I actually meant that to be true.

That being said, that's what we're looking at. We're looking at giving employers the ability to convert defined benefit plans to pixie dust plans, and the rules around how they will do that will be: "You know, don't worry about it. We'll just pat you on the head. We'll figure it out ourselves around the little cabinet table, and we'll let you know. We will probably talk to some more employers because, by the way, that's why we're bringing this in in the first place, because our pals in big business wanted us to do it."

So who are some of the people that we're looking at? Well, TransAlta, Suncor. These are the folks that came to this government and said: hey, you know, if you could tweak that pension plan legislation so that we could be sure to abandon our liabilities to those pesky little employees that we have, that would be super awesome. So that's what we're doing right now. That's what this piece of legislation will ultimately achieve. And everyone

will say, "Oh, that's not what we're doing; we're protecting the plan for the future, and yada yada yada; trust us," because, of course, this bill is also written on the trust us basis, you know, thou shalt have authority to do whatever the cabinet in its great wisdom thinks is necessary. You see a lot of that throughout this act, that we will just sort of take the retirement hopes and dreams of 250,000 Albertans, or in this case 138,000 Albertans, and just give them over to this incredibly trustworthy cabinet who is doing so well when they poll Albertans on how trustworthy Albertans think they are right now. Anyway, so that's what this does.

Now, this is really concerning to me, Madam Speaker. You know, we've talked about this generally in the past, but the fact of the matter is that we've seen retirement savings by Canadians drop. Canadians today only set aside about 5.5 per cent of their income for retirement, down from 20 per cent in the '80s. We've seen the number of Canadians who are covered by defined pensions drop well below 40 per cent of Canadians now. What that means is that the number of Canadians, and in this case Albertans, who will live in poverty is going to grow.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in his question to the minister today in question period highlighted the experience of a state in the U.S. where they moved away from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan, and 15, 20 years later they discovered they had a huge problem because their seniors were all really super poor and hungry and they couldn't afford health care and they couldn't afford rent. It just was bad news, and they realized that this was very much connected to the fact that they had gutted their public service pension plan. So they decided that they needed to go back to the drawing board and reconsider this notion of eliminating defined benefit pension plans.

Well, the fact of the matter is that that is the trajectory that we are on in this province and in this country, and it is not just me saying it. Pretty much every expert out there on the state of Canadians' retirement planning and retirement savings will say that we are heading for a crisis. Many experts who are concerned about the well-being of the majority of those impending retirees, those people who are actually elected to represent the overarching public interest, those people are saying that what we actually need to be doing is increasing pensions, increasing, for instance, CPP and enhancing that particular defined benefit, because that, too, is a defined benefit.

Lo and behold, here we are in Alberta up until a couple of years ago the one holdout in the whole country saying no to building up the CPP. Why? Well, I don't know. Maybe their friends in the banking industry won't make as big a commission on the RSPs. I have no idea how you could possibly say that that's not a good idea, but trust Alberta; we did. So hand in hand with that miserly, unconcerned approach to the best interests of regular working Albertans and their families comes a piece of legislation like this, that is designed to give the employer sponsors of plans a much easier time in the process of reducing the nature of the benefits that their employees will receive.

I want to talk just a little bit even about those employees who are covered by union plans. Of course, the argument would be: well, you know, this conversion will only happen if both sponsors of the plan agree, and where you've got unionized, collectively bargained, sole-employer contribution plans or defined benefit contribution plans, it would only happen if the union agrees. What this is essentially doing is taking something that the union has won and earned and putting it back on the bargaining table, so it's forcing unions to actually bargain for something that they thought they'd already bargained for.

10:30

They had something protected in legislation. It's sort of akin to saying: "Well, you know, I know you don't think you need to bargain employment standards minimums and minimum wage, but you know what? We're going to make you bargain that. We're going to make you earn those standards at the bargaining table even though they've been there in legislation for 80 years or whatever." This is the same kind of thing, and this is unbalancing the negotiating process.

Now, I understand that these folks wouldn't understand that because negotiation is kind of a foreign term.

Mr. Mason: Not in their vocabulary.

Ms Notley: It's not in the vocabulary of this government.

This is an attempt to undermine, destabilize, and weaken the bargaining position of even those employees who are represented by unions. It's not a complete answer to say, "Oh, don't worry; it won't happen if the union doesn't agree to it" because you're opening the door and inviting the union to come in and have to bargain all of that over again. That's a solution.

I look forward to speaking about this more in the future.

The Acting Speaker: We have 29(2)(a). Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was quite enjoying the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's speech, educating many of the members in this Assembly on the difference between defined benefit and target benefit, but I was hoping that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona maybe can explain further, especially for some of the members on the front bench, exactly what she means by pixie dust pensions.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, really, today in question period the Minister of Finance said: I will not in any way, shape, or form reduce the benefits Alberta pensioners will receive. That was actually in relation to both bills 9 and 10 and the policy considerations implied in those questions. The fact of the matter is that, no, that's not true. There are a number of different areas where we're looking at that.

What this bill does is that it makes it very clear that by moving to a targeted benefit, where the contributions are not high enough and where the assets are not great enough, this gives the pension plan administrators the ability to reduce benefits. That's right there in the legislation, Madam Speaker.

Truly, when we met with the folks from the minister's ministry who briefed us on this – and I appreciate the time that they gave, by the way; it was a very informative briefing and very helpful to us – it was very clear that that's what you're doing. Nobody tried to suggest that a targeted benefit plan was the same as a defined benefit plan, and no one for a moment tried to suggest that a targeted benefit plan wouldn't result in the potential for lost income.

Not only do people not have a guaranteed cost-of-living increase – just to be clear, in Alberta, you know, our cost of living is going up rather aggressively, especially compared to the rest of the country. If we don't keep pace through COLA, pensioners are going to lose. Of course, we're already at a point where we only do 60 per cent – well, this is in the other one, of course – and now the government wants to make that more flexible.

That's an argument for Bill 9, but the whole other issue is that with targeted benefits you could get way less, so it's not even a question of keeping the same amount and watching it become less

and less valuable if someone fails to have it keep pace with COLA. Instead, we're actually seeing the amount drop unpredictably. After you've retired, you cannot count on how much you will receive every month or every year. That's what a targeted benefit plan is. You know, that's really super clear, and that's why I referred to it as the pixie dust plan.

Mr. Mason: But who is Tinker Bell?

Ms Notley: Tinker Bell is the fabulous Minister of Finance, I guess. I've never really thought of him as Tinker Bell-ish. Perhaps he's not even listening now. In any event, it will be the minister who is Tinker Bell because, again, the other issue is that a great deal of authority is given to the minister and to the cabinet. As a result, it certainly won't be the employees.

I'm very, very concerned about this as well because, you know, with Bill 9 I know members over there will have to acknowledge that they've received countless concerns expressed to them by constituents about what Bill 9 is going to do to them. They may not have heard the same about Bill 10, but one of the reasons for that, of course, is because those who are at greatest risk under Bill 10 are those people who are part of defined benefit plans right now but don't have a union. My question is: how many of those people even know this is happening? How many of those people have been notified? How many of those people have been consulted with? How many of those people have been asked whether this was the direction they want to go in? I will say to you that the answer is none. Then the question becomes: well, how will they be consulted? The answer from these guys is: trust me. That's not the way you should be legislating, and it is certainly not the way you should be legislating something as fundamental and as meaningful to the vast majority of working Albertans as a defined benefit pension plan to which they have been contributing for many, many years and that is extremely important to them.

We're looking at about, I think, 70,000 non-union members who are impacted by this. If that number is a little high, I'm happy to hear that. Either way, it's bad news for them.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that wish to speak to Bill 10 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm rising tonight to speak against Bill 10, and I'd hope that all members of the Assembly listen to what is happening here in this province in regard to what we're doing on bills 9 and 10 and how it is an attack on working people, what they've contributed to their pension plans, what they believed they had set themselves up for as a reasonable retirement, how they were going to pay their daily bills, and how they were going to try and make it through life when they are no longer working.

Before I get to the merits of the bill, I would like to point out that the evidence is clear. Economists and government reports and industry reports all indicate that seniors in Canada are retiring with less and less money compared to the way things have been over the course of the last 50 years. Essentially, through attacks like these on pension plans as well as a move to a workforce that is less unionized and, frankly, to government supports being less, people have an inability to retire like they have in the past.

This is leading to an increasingly unequal society. You see that with statistics offered at various times in publications and the like which show statistics. You know, in 1980 the average employer made 40 times more than his worker did. Now the average employer in Canada makes 235 times more than an employee. You see, it's clear that there's been a move throughout the course

of the last 35 years to inequality, a real sense where governments have favoured certain individuals, especially here in Alberta certain wealthy individuals, individuals from certain industries, and have left behind or not considered the effects on the middle class and, even worse, the plight of those who are in meagre circumstances. That's just a plain fact.

10:40

This does nothing. Bills like bills 9 and 10 here do nothing to rectify or to look at the problem of inequality. In fact, they exacerbate it. One of the ways that working people who have gotten involved in pension plans can ensure they retire with at least some form of income is to negotiate a pension plan in their workplace, whether they're represented by a public-sector union or whether they work in private industry at a place like TransAlta or the like that has these defined benefit plans. Remember that these were negotiated fairly amongst employees and through unions at the bargaining table, who then came to the conclusion that that's the way they wanted their compensation packages addressed, through both the employer and employee contributing to these plans, that that would ensure that they would have a reasonable standard of living in their retirement years, and to ensure that they had a reasonable standard of living in their retirement years, they would need to have a defined benefit plan.

As the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona so rightly pointed out, when you move from a defined benefit plan to a target benefit plan, you're moving to basically a pension plan that's based on a hope and a prayer and wishful thinking because that's all they are. Simply put, when you move from there, it gives no protection to the retiring person that income will be there for them when they need it going forward. It has no air of reality as to when inflation goes up or when stock markets go down or when governments swoop in to do things of this nature. Simply put, it really exacerbates the inequality we are seeing here in Alberta and, frankly, throughout the rest of Canada.

In my view, instead of governments continuing on in this fashion, like we see in bills 9 and 10 and what we're doing here, we should be looking at ways to ensure more people have pensions, that more people have predictable, sustainable income that they can rely on in their senior years, whether that's through augmenting the Canada pension program or other things like encouraging people to get into defined benefit plans, that they can then count on in their retirement. This appears to be directly opposite to what we know to be in the best interests of our seniors.

What is most troubling to me here, though, too, is that by doing this, the government may actually be adding to the expenses that they will have to carry in the future without these employees now having a defined benefit plan or, virtually, whether they have any income at all coming from their pension. Well, that essentially means that the government is looking at more seniors in subsidized housing, more seniors who may be in need of seniors' benefits and the like. It may actually just be adding to the government expenses in the long run as compared to doing it in the proactive way, having a defined benefit plan.

In my view, this is the wrong way to go. It affects a large number of people in Alberta. I believe the number that I heard was 250,000 individuals who will be affected by this change. Some of them will be, of course, in a unionized environment, and as was rightfully pointed out, these were benefits they had bargained for. They had worked these out with the employer and had come to an agreement thereon. They are now being systematically stripped away by the government at the drop of a bill. That, to me, doesn't appear right.

I'm also very worried about those employees who are not in a union and what is actually going to happen to them, whether it's just a winding up of the pension plan altogether, which, in my view, could happen in some of these situations because there won't be the organization where they can bind together and look at things in an objective manner, or the simple power of the employer to push through things that may not be in their best interests and the like.

Nevertheless, I hope to speak more on this at subsequent intervals. I hope that we can look at this, at whether this is really good for stemming inequality in this province, which many people identified as one of the single largest threats to not only this province but actually to many governments throughout the world. I don't think this does anything to address that. It doesn't deal with anything about seniors' incomes and what their retirements are going to look like.

In my view, bills 9 and 10 go against this principle, and I would encourage all members to vote against this and go from there. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask a quick couple of questions of the hon. member because I've heard again a little bit of a recurring theme here. One of them is that when you talk about going from a defined benefit to a targeted benefit, there is a huge loss or some sort of loss to the retirement infrastructure for people who are in those plans. First of all, the joint sponsorship of those plans would have to agree to move in that direction. My thought would be that the only reason they would do that is if the plan was in very dire straits and they needed to move to make some changes and have that flexibility.

The hon. members talked about it being on a wing and a prayer or something, that somehow this would be based on some sort of... [interjection] I'm assuming he's talking about that the returns of the fund would be the determinant factor of whether or not the benefits would be paid. I guess what I'm asking is: if the fund does not give a suitable amount of return, where would the hon. member think that the money is going to come from to pay for the benefits if there's no money or return given the fact that the fund is the fund that would pay those benefits? If they're suggesting that under a defined benefit plan the fund will always earn enough to pay the benefits, then, I guess, we have no problem if they could guarantee that, which they can't.

I'm curious if the hon. member would please enlighten the House. In a targeted benefit plan or in a defined benefit plan if the returns are not there, where would the funds come from if not from the employer and from the employees paycheques? Just curious.

Mr. Hehr: The hon. minister answered his own question. I don't know why he's asking me this. It would come from the employers and the employees. Of course it would. It would come from those generations that are continuing to work, hopefully, at the company where they're active and productive to ensure that they understand that when a pension plan is there for their retired employees, it is also going to be there for them. I don't know why the hon. minister seems confused about this. It seems very simple that that's how we've had defined contribution plans, and that's how they work. Maybe that's the trouble. Maybe why he's going about this is that someone, maybe a deputy minister, has got a hold of him and filled his head full of all sorts of nonsense and has gotten

him down a path of how he wants to take away pensions not only from those under Bill 9 but also under Bill 10. It seems illogical that the hon. minister would not understand where the money comes from. It would come from employers and employees, of course. That's just how it is.

10:50

I'm also really surprised that the hon. minister does not quite understand that there are a great many seniors in this province who do not have enough revenue to get by in today's world, with inflation running at 3.9 per cent, with the cost of living and the likes there, and simply the overarching evidence that is out there that we should be doing more for seniors, not less. Yet his government chooses to do less. It is really befuddling to me how the minister asks his questions and doesn't understand. He should go back to his deputy ministers and talk about this and say: where am I getting it wrong? He clearly has it wrong.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The interesting piece to that is that if you don't have enough contributors paying in and you've got more retirees, the plan fails. That's what the hon. member doesn't get.

The Acting Speaker: Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yes. I believe, Madam Speaker, that it is the practice to alternate questions. If another member has a question under 29(2)(a), you don't let the same person go twice.

The Acting Speaker: I understood that we had a back and forth. He asked questions. He was going to answer. We'll ask Parliamentary Counsel to . . .

Mr. Horner: May I continue to answer the question?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: The answer to the hon. member's question is: when the number of retirees is tripling and the number of new contributors is only doubling or staying the same, the money isn't there. That's the problem with defined benefit plans that are mature. The hon. member should actually know that. If he had actually done his work as a Finance critic, he would understand that defined benefit plans in this country and around the world are having difficulty because there are more retirees than there are new entrants to the plan. The PSPP plan, as a really good example, in 1993 had 40,000 contributors. In 2013: still 40,000 contributors yet the number of retirees had almost tripled. To coin the phrase from the Auditor General in Public Accounts, the math doesn't work.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Is there another member that wishes to speak to Bill 10? [interjection] You'll get your chance later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to the second reading of Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act. In a moment, when I speak, I will address the title of it, which is misleading, that it's private sector when, in fact, we'll see how there are public-sector employees that are going to be affected negatively by this act.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to start by stating the fact that I'm absolutely opposed to this bill, Bill 10, and to Bill 9. I'll give my

arguments, but I'll ask members to vote against this bill. It needs to be thrown out from start to finish.

Part of one of the major issues that I have with this bill, Madam Speaker, is that we've got a significant number of pensioners that have been paying into their pensions for many, many years; some, for their whole working life. Suddenly now with the passage of this bill rules can completely change. So a pensioner who had worked, signed up from day one thinking that they were going to get a certain amount in their retirement, could with the stroke of a pen suddenly see their benefits reduced significantly. Now, I'd love for someone on the other side of the House to try to tell me how that's fair. You've been promised something, you've been working toward it, you've been saving for it, and now suddenly the government says: "No. You're not getting that anymore. We're going to actually cut back on what you've contributed to for your whole life."

Now, another issue with this bill, which we seem to see a lot more of. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who's been a member here in the House a lot longer than I have, has told me that in the past we would see legislation that didn't give sweeping powers so much to the ministers. Well, it is very disturbing, Madam Speaker, that these bills that I've seen since I've been a member, which in about an hour and four minutes will be, I believe, two years to the day if we're going on April 23 – much of the legislation that the government has brought in does in fact give the minister and cabinet sweeping powers to make changes, which I think, first of all, is very problematic. I mean, when we're talking about making significant changes to any legislation, whether it's through regulation, it should be discussed and debated in this House. It should not be allowed to be done with the stroke of a pen behind closed doors so that folks wake up in the morning and see that the tooth fairy stole their tooth and has not given them anything in return.

First of all, the government is trying to pitch this bill as encouraging those who have pension plans to continue contributing to them because the pension participation is very low. Now, again, "private sector" within parentheses in the title of this act is again a misnomer. The fact of the matter, Madam Speaker, is that there are public-sector pension plans that qualify under this bill such as the university's academic pension plan, the firefighters' supplementary pension plan, and other small municipality plans. You know, one of my concerns is that this PC government's long game is to put LAPP and PSPP under this piece of legislation. That's going to affect a significant number of people and is the old bait and switch.

There are about 250,000 workers that fall under this act, and I believe the number is somewhere around 138,000 of them that have defined pensions. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona noted earlier, part of the reason there isn't and hasn't been as much public outcry on this bill – first of all, I would draw Albertans' attention to the time of day that we're debating this second reading. As well, many of the folks who are affected by this bill do not have a larger group or a union to represent them or a vehicle to voice their malcontent for Bill 10.

Now, here's the thing, Madam Speaker. I mean, pensions benefit all of us in the sense that, again, we're not only talking about individuals being able to afford to pay their bills, pay their heating. You know, the concept of pensions, again, comes from the fact that you have folks who have decided to take certain occupations or certain jobs and looked at how they would be remunerated for their work, the pension being a part of it. It's not that the pension is some kind of bonus gift, a Christmas bonus that can be withdrawn whenever the government or a minister feels like it. This is something that has been negotiated, that is part of

their contract and part of the reason that many Albertans have made the decision to work for certain employers or to take certain careers.

So the benefit of it, obviously, let's say, for someone living in a small town having a decent pension means that not only can they afford to live, but they're also contributing to the economy. Let's keep in mind, as well, that folks pay tax on them when they're drawing their pension, so this is also contributing to the economy.

The other frustration with bills 9 and 10 is that the number of Canadians covered by pensions is declining. The amount that Canadians are saving for retirement is dropping, which is a concern. We should be looking ahead and doing what we can to take smart, prudent actions and to expand our pension system, not shrink it.

11:00

Again, the Alberta NDP has been pushing for an expansion of the CPP. There are many provinces across the country that are willing and are in favour of expanding CPP, except for, of course, the government in Alberta. The good old PC government: if it's good for the people, then it's bad for them.

Moving again back to the title, like I said, this legislation is going to affect 138,000 workers with defined benefit pensions. I listed some of those that are going to be affected, and the concern is with the fact that the minister is going to have sweeping powers.

Let me see here. [interjections] I'm happy to hear that some members on the other side are listening. I'm going to go through just briefly and explain again the difference between the three different pensions. We've got defined benefit, which is exactly what it says. When you started your work, whether it was 30 years ago, 40 years ago, 10 years ago, or five years ago, you'd know how much you're going to get when you retire. It's defined. It's not going to change. You don't have to worry about how much a loaf of bread is going to cost, whether you're retiring in five years, 10 years, 20 years. You don't have to worry about, again, the cost of electricity or to heat your home and what that's going to look like.

Madam Speaker, there are a significant number of Albertans who don't have pensions, who don't have defined benefit pensions, and every time they see a rise in inflation or in the cost of living, you know, they're making tough decisions on heating their house versus filling their prescriptions. The advantage to a defined benefit plan is that there's a formula that you signed up for and agreed to with your employer from day one. You know what you're going to get. So if you work for X number of years, for example, you're entitled to X amount of dollars a month once you retire. Okay? So that plan, obviously, is the best plan as far as our seniors, our workers knowing that they have that retirement security.

Now, a couple of things about defined benefits here. You know, the way it works is that if the pension plan is underfunded, then contributions can or have to go up in order to meet the needs for the unfunded liability portion. What that means under defined benefit is that that increase is split by both the employer and the employee. Monthly payments into the pension plan go up for those that are still working, and matching contributions, like I said, from the employer also increase to make sure that that promise is delivered.

I mean, pension fund managers can't predict the future, so there are times when that fund is going to be overinvested and there are times that it's going to be underinvested. But what's important to realize is that these plans should be looked at as long term and looked at over the long term, not in specific snapshots. You know, we're all aware of what happened in 2008 and the fact that not just

plans but, obviously, the stock market took quite a hit and with it a lot of different plans, whether it was pension plans or investments. The flip side as far as pensions is that we have been building it back up, and 2013 was a great year, that actually produced a significant rate of return. Again, this plan, the best plan, defined benefit, is that Albertans don't have to worry about being able to afford to live in their retirement or about outliving their retirement.

Now, defined contribution is exactly that. The only thing that's set in stone is what you're putting in, the employer and employee. One of the challenges with defined contribution is, you know, that when you get to retirement, if you haven't saved enough or if you live too long or if your investments don't perform well enough, well, then you've got to either get a job when you're in your 80s or you simply can't afford to live. There's no safety net under the defined contribution. That's putting a lot of risk onto individuals, onto Albertans.

The third type of plan is the target benefit. Now, this one basically is the worst of the three. I would argue that the only way to go is the defined benefit. This one basically allows for folks that are receiving benefits at the moment in their pensions – they've paid into their plans for years and years, their pension payments, and what they're getting in retirement can be unilaterally changed under this legislation. Target benefit plan contribution rates are fixed for employers and employees, and the benefits to retirees can fluctuate based on the health of the pension fund. This clearly sounds like the worst of all three.

I'll give you a quick example. A person has benefits dropping based on meeting a target of 100 per cent solvency within five years. So the pensioners get their benefits cut to the extent necessary to see the plan return to full health in the next five years. But such a plan could have such a dramatic effect on a pensioner's monthly income during a recession like 2008. The first to go under this is any idea that your benefits will actually keep up with the cost of living. Again, you're stuck with fixed benefits even though we all know that due to inflation the cost of living is continually going up year after year. Under this plan, the targeted, your actual core benefits, what you signed up for, what you were promised, can be chopped, can be changed or dramatically reduced with the stroke of a pen. So people are getting by on even less. The security for a retiree is gone.

You know, it's important to note, Madam Speaker, that a number of, I would say, Albertans and Canadians, when they're thinking about what career to go into, look at not just salary in a given year, but they also look at benefits and they look at retirement security.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On 29(2)(a) I just wanted to ask the hon. member whether or not he agrees with the Treasurer's proposition, as it were, that the only time that this act would be used to allow the conversion of a plan from a defined benefit plan to a target benefit plan was if the plan was completely unsupportable, if there just weren't enough new people paying into the plan to continue it. Or might there be the situation . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, could you please speak into the microphone so that we can hear you?

Mr. Mason: Oh, sure.

An Hon. Member: Some of us are listening.

Mr. Mason: Really? Okay. All right.

The question really is that the Provincial Treasurer asserted that the only time this plan would be used was if the plan was completely unsustainable, and then everybody would have to see that it should be converted and that the benefits should be curtailed in order to match it. I'm asking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview if it might not be a situation where the plan might be in some trouble and the employer wants to do exactly what the government wants to do – that is, wants to not pay any extra in order to get the plan back – but the employees want to pay, whether allowing the minister to make all of the decisions about which option would be chosen is going to in fact be fair to the workers or whether or not we can actually trust the government or the minister of the day to protect the workers' rights when the employer is looking to convert the plan and there is a fundamental disagreement about the future plan and different options that might be available.

11:10

Mr. Bilous: Well, I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the question. I think that, to state it quite simply, I trust the Finance minister as far as I can throw him. Needless to say, there have been too many examples where this PC government promises one thing and does the exact opposite. From their actions can Albertans trust that the minister or cabinet will make the best decisions or decisions in their best interests? Sadly, time and time again we have examples of the fact that, no, they will not.

Again, you know, many workers in this province are part of unions that expect to go to the bargaining table in good faith with this government, and the way that this government operates, as we've seen, is that if they don't get the response they want, they'll just come in and legislate. It's shameful and almost laughable when the Education minister talks about negotiating the teachers' agreement last year. I mean, you legislate it because you have some locals that say: no; this is a bad deal. Legislating is not negotiating.

I think this legislation is cause for real concern for workers, especially, again, because with the stroke of a pen the minister can completely change what was promised. I honestly believe that Albertans, when learning about that ability in this legislation, will be outraged. Imagine yourself, Madam Speaker, that you've been promised a certain amount. You've put in your duty, your 20 or 30 years. You're expecting an outcome or a certain dollar amount or benefits on the other end when you retire. Let's say that you're in your second year of retirement and suddenly the minister decides that with a stroke of pen they're going to change that and cut back your benefits even though you've been paying into it for 30 years. I mean, there's nothing that's more undemocratic, in my view, than that.

You know, this bill and the fact that it does give the minister a significant amount of power to make changes to pensions and to what Albertans were promised is shameful.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and speak to Bill 10, Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014. In general the bill is intended to amend the unproclaimed Employment Pension Plans Act of 2012, which was supported by all four caucuses. If passed, this bill would allow private-sector pension plan administrators to convert previously

accrued defined benefits to targeted benefits without permission from the superintendent of pensions.

Therein lies, I think, one of the fundamental problems that this government is having not only with this bill but with other bills that relate to public-sector and private-sector workers and, indeed, Albertans in general. It's the lack of due process. The minister has indicated that he has been consulting with people, but I guess the question is: has he been accommodating people? Has he been listening to the point where he is making the kinds of decisions that reflect the input he's getting and the balance of interests he says that he's trying to achieve? On the face of it it raises questions about his ability to balance two different interests that have in this case come into conflict.

Again, in my view, this government is struggling with a crisis of trust in this province. When it comes to something as sensitive, emotional, fundamental, and part of our human security needs as a pension fund, they're starting off with at least one hand and one leg tied behind their back because they have no trust in this province. They have repeatedly talked about consultation, whether it's with First Nations or with unions or with landowners, and don't appear to understand that the process is as important as the outcome. It may well be that there is a liability, and the minister has talked about the liability. It would appear that he is reluctant to admit that the liability has already gone down substantially over the past year, but it may well be that our generation is living longer than the previous generation and we have more drawers on the pension than we have contributors to the pension. What I hear repeatedly from economists, some economists at least, and some actuarial experts is that this is being addressed. It is fundamentally, especially in our growing economy, that we're seeing many of these, including – I just read today – Air Canada: a \$4.4 billion unfunded liability with their private-sector people is basically gone after a year.

So one has to wonder, again, about why the government has launched into this at this time. What evidence has pushed this particular agenda? Again, the theme is recurring, that average Albertans have lost a sense of being a part of this discussion, a part of a government that is supposed to be representing them, and have lost trust in the government's commitment to due process, whether it's public sector or private sector.

People are currently, indeed, living longer than 10 years ago, but many people don't believe this is going to be sustained.

In the name of serving the public interest, this government has not consulted in a meaningful way and accommodated the various interests that people are requesting and shown, I guess, what I would call fundamental respect for the boards and the negotiators, in this case the private-sector unions and individuals and the employers.

Clearly, they set the tone with bills 45 and 46, that have alienated so many not only in the unions but in the public sector, that fly in the face of basic human rights and due process, and they now are dealing with a public and unions that do not trust that this government has their best interests at heart. It appears again, whether true or not, that this government is intent on balancing its own books and looking good from a financial perspective without addressing the need to accommodate the long-term interests of seniors and people close to retirement and people who are building their retirement package at current times and that this government would arbitrarily insert itself in a process instead of respecting the maturity and the capacity of industry and their employees to deal with these issues in a responsible way, just as Air Canada did in the past week, as I indicated. They reported a major unfunded liability as being addressed because they know how to do it. I mean, these are employers. They understand

balancing future interests and current funding. This government has demonstrated a consistent lack of understanding of the importance of a process. In addition to getting results, there has to be a legitimate process that everyone respects and that everyone feels is valued.

In a similar way, I guess, people are asking about whether this minister can be trusted to balance the employee interest with government interest, and without that trust it's very difficult to envision success for this government in either these bills or other bills such as 45 and 46.

To quote another person, in his book *Good to Great* Jim Collins wrote the classic on principles of successful, sustainable business. It is perhaps true that this government aspires to greatness of business, but it's lost its way in part because government is not a business. As Ken Chapman mentioned today over coffee, governments should be working for the greater good as opposed to simply talking about going from good to great in this province.

11:20

So moving to targeted premiums from defined benefits raises again the whole question of trust. Who is going to determine what those targeted pension funds will look like, and if this government intends to insert itself in this process, how does it reflect a respect for the employer and the employee, who to me are the experts in how to manage their own pension funds? This is undermining a pretty fundamental relationship, and I don't think that it's going to serve either very well.

In the 1990s there were unfunded liabilities higher than today's. There were agreements at that time for targeted premiums to pay the unfunded liability that has now resolved itself. Private employers currently can withdraw from the plan, but this new bill makes it unclear how that arrangement will change. So, Madam Speaker, it's very clear to me that this government is not only inserting itself in a process that has self-correcting capacity; it is offending people on both sides that have respect for the process, and they are creating much more instability, uncertainty, and distrust than they are creating certainty and trust around this important area of all of our lives.

Given the modest nature of many of these pensions I think it's fair to say that this is going to be a very significant two weeks in the history of this government because it's an example, again, of how they really don't listen with any real intent to change their direction. They have an agenda. They give nominal support to a consultative process. But in the end they know exactly where they're going, and that's apparent from this and many other bills that I've watched go through this House in the last eight years.

So we on this side of the House, the Alberta Liberal caucus, will not be supporting this bill among others. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Do we have any members who wish to question or comment? Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: On 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mason: Sure, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, just a comment. I really did appreciate your speech. It was good, and I would really like to hear a little more.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm very grateful that you give me yet more time to speak on something that I do actually feel very strongly

about, that this government is meddlesome, it is disrespectful, it focuses much more on outcomes than on process, and it doesn't accommodate in a meaningful way the consultation with people, whether it's employers or employees. I think it's been demonstrated again and again in this House that they are losing ground fast as a result of the kinds of processes. Some of the decisions and goals are laudable, but the process often stinks, and that's what you're paying a price for today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Three minutes left. Anybody else on 29(2)(a)?

Are there any others who wish to speak in second reading to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [interjections] The bleatings from the other side are getting louder and less coherent as the hours tick by.

I'm pleased to stand and speak for the first time to second reading of Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014. I think that there's a very important change that is being made here. It allows plan administrators to change defined benefit plans to target benefit plans, and the only caveat is that it is to be done in accordance with rules established by the minister.

Now, the minister has said earlier that, in fact, you know, there are pension plans that aren't sustainable because there aren't enough new people working to support a large number of retirees at all of the benefits that they had been receiving. It's quite true that in some cases that has occurred, and plans simply collapse because there's not enough people paying in to afford the benefits.

But that's not the only time this legislation would be used, Madam Speaker. I think that's really the important point, and the minister skipped right over that as if it would be cut and dried in every case where a plan was not sustainable as a defined benefit plan and had to be converted, and everybody would agree, and all he's just doing is getting government out of the way so they can go ahead and make the changes that everybody agrees upon. Nothing could be further from the truth, as we've seen with the debate over provincial pensions, over the public-sector pension plans.

Different people have different numbers, different people make different assumptions, and different people have different interests. Employees in this case want to retain the full benefits that they currently have under the public plan, but government doesn't want to pay the price of keeping those plans whole and is moving to convert it by stealth into what is effectively a target benefit plan. That's really what it is because with a cap in place if you can't increase the payments by the employer and the employees to sustain the plan, something has to give, and you have to reduce the benefits. It is, essentially, because of those changes, going to become a target benefit plan, something the government does not want to admit. In fact, their propaganda is all about how this can be protected as a defined benefit plan. Nothing could be further from the truth with respect to that.

We're going to see many kinds of situations emerge in these various private-sector plans where there would be disagreements between the employers and the employees, and then the question is: who gets to make the decision? Well, guess who, Madam Speaker? It's going to be the minister. It's going to be the cabinet. They're the ones that are going to decide. I don't know. Maybe we could just guess here. Based on their track record, how many think that they'll side with the employees? Okay. One. How many think that they'll decide to side with the employers? Well, lots more. I

think that that's probably a fair assessment of what this... [interjection] It was 4 to 1. We won a vote against you, so just deal with it. Just deal with it, okay? [interjections]

Ms Notley: It's not the kind of vote we wanted to win, though.

Mr. Mason: Yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor.

Mr. Mason: So you see what it's like.

Now, Madam Speaker, I think it's important that, you know, we have to recognize that in the bill there are no parameters around how a decision about the viability of a defined benefit plan would be determined. There is no set of rules or criteria that would allow an objective assessment about the viability of some of these plans. It's all left up to the minister to make the decision, and that's just not good enough.

I'm sure that as we progress, this plan will enable employers to wriggle out of their responsibilities in their negotiated defined benefit plans, and I think that's what the intent is. In my opinion, that is exactly what the long-term goal of the government is. That's why we've decided that Bill 10 is just as bad as Bill 9.

11:30

In fact, I think that there are a lot of reasons why the true intent of this plan needs to be thoroughly discussed and that the government needs to be a little more straightforward. It has got this private-sector note, in brackets, on the bill. We think it's a misnomer because some public-sector plans would qualify under this act, like the universities academic pension plan, the firefighters' supplementary pension plan, and some plans of small municipalities. We also believe that the government's long-term game is to put the PSPP and the local authorities pension plan under this piece of legislation, so calling this a bill that affects private-sector pensions, I think, is not misleading.

The minister has said that this has been called for, this act has been requested by employers. But he has not, as far as we're aware, consulted with some of the major unions that are invested in private-sector pension plans. There may be a few – I'd like to hear who they were – but when we started calling some of the large unions in the private sector, they were unaware of this bill and had certainly not been consulted about it. Again, it's that same one-sided approach, where the government may have consulted with some employers. There may have been some employer requests to move in this direction. It wouldn't surprise me. But I will also recall that today when I was speaking at the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, I was approached by one of the senior people there, who asked me why the government was going after pensions and said that as far as they were concerned, they had not requested it. They had not asked the government to move against pensions of Albertans, including public-sector pensions.

I think it's really unclear who wants this bill. I think the minister should tell Albertans and tell the House who exactly wants this bill and what their rationale was. He should tell us whom he's consulted with. Whom has the government talked to with respect to this piece of legislation? I don't believe there's been any comprehensive consultation whatsoever. This is just another arbitrary move by this government, where they decide something is going to happen and they move the legislation. We've seen that every time they do that, they shed very significant amounts of public support. I raised that the other day in question period. When they brought in bills 19 and 36 and 50, attacking landowners' rights, they pretty much lost their right wing. When

they brought in bills 45 and 46, attacking public-sector workers and their bargaining rights, they pretty much lost whatever left wing they had. And when they brought in these two bills, they lost their landing gear. You can see where the good airship PC government is headed, Madam Speaker, and it's not going down for a soft landing. I think that's clear.

This kind of arbitrary approach: "Let's not negotiate; let's not use our political skills to get a settlement. We'll decide what needs to be done from our point of view, and we'll just legislate it." People have had enough of that approach, Madam Speaker. They've absolutely had enough of that approach, and they've had enough of this PC government.

At this particular point, Madam Speaker, because of our serious concern with this, I would like to move an amendment to the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, can we pause for a moment while we circulate that amendment to the rest of the members in the House, please?

Mr. Mason: You'll let me know when to proceed to read the amendment?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, if you'd like to go ahead and read the amendment while we're finishing passing it around.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 10, Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 10, Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the bill forces unilateral changes to pension schemes that endanger the health of the plans and restricts transparency and decision-making authority for members.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you understand this is a hoist amendment?

Mr. Mason: It's not a hoist. It's a reasoned amendment, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Do you want me to speak now?

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead and proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The motion is quite clear. We believe that it forces unilateral changes or permits unilateral changes to pension schemes that may not involve proper consultation with all parties nor balance the interests of all of the parties to a pension scheme and may result in actions that endanger the health of the plan and that the process by which it does so lacks transparency and takes away decision-making authority from members of the particular plan. As a result, we believe that we should not read this bill now a second time. That is the reason why we don't think it should be read a second time; therefore, it's known as a reasoned amendment.

In my view, Madam Speaker, the arguments have been made quite well that, in fact, what we're seeing with this act is actually the creation of a vehicle to allow large private employers and in some cases public employers to convert their plans regardless of the wishes of the people who have paid into the plans and who will receive the benefits from the plans. They have a major ally in

that in this provincial government. So I think it's pretty clear that the government's intention here in the long run is to assist large employers to wrap up their pension plans or to convert them to targeted benefit plans, and that is something that I think is absolutely unacceptable.

Madam Speaker, when people go to retire, they have a lifetime of work behind them. They have a limited time in which to enjoy the benefits and the fruits of their labour. They have made plans and they have dreams, and they don't have a chance to do it again. They don't have opportunities for a second chance. When unilateral changes are made to their pensions that reduce that and change everything that they worked for and everything that they planned for, it's just heart-wrenching, and it's unacceptable. For this government to be facilitating it and even, through this legislation, encouraging it is absolutely reprehensible.

This bill should not be passed, and we should pass this amendment in order to send a clear message to this government that they're out of touch, they're out of step with the desires and the needs of Alberta families and Alberta retirees and Alberta seniors. It's time they started focusing on the regular folks in this province who've worked hard all their lives and have eked out a modest retirement benefit for themselves instead of constantly picking on the poor, on the disabled, on the seniors, on middle-class families, attacking education and health care.

It's time this government stopped and looked in the mirror and said: "Why is it that we're in so much trouble? Why is it that we're in so much disarray?" Well, frankly, it wasn't just the former Premier's flights to different parts of the world or her use of government aircraft. If this government had kept its promises that it made in the last election, if it had followed through and done what it said that it was going to do for Alberta families, then I think its popularity, despite the former Premier's transgressions, would have remained fairly high because those were things that people wanted. Those were things that people voted for.

11:40

When it comes right down to it, when they threw the Premier over the side, it was not because of her style or how she dealt with people because people on the other side were willing to put up with that stuff for two years. It was because they were so low in the polls that a vast majority of the members opposite feared the loss of their seats. They have reason to fear the loss of their seats, Madam Speaker, because this is the kind of legislation, this is the kind of approach that has led this government to the cliff, to the abyss, and to the end of its dynasty. I think it's high time that this Legislature stood up to the government, including members on the other side, and said: "No more. We need to be on the side of the working people. We need to be on the side of middle-class families. We need to look after our seniors."

The Acting Speaker: Is there anyone on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Horner: This is on the motion, is it not?

The Acting Speaker: He has moved the recent amendment, so we get to debate it.

Mr. Horner: Yeah. I want to speak to the amendment, Madam Speaker, not 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: All right. But first we have to make sure that nobody wants to speak on 29(2)(a).

You'd like to speak on 29(2)(a), hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder?

Mr. Eggen: Oh, absolutely. Well, I was just curious to know – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was making a very good point about how this is sort of a fundamental shift away from the public that probably largely voted for this government here. What effects does it really have on that same group of people? Quite frankly, I'm surprised to see both of these bills come forward at this juncture, a very sort of shaky time for the ruling party. So I just would like to hear more about how, you know, it might shake down in a place like Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, I certainly spend a lot of time talking to my constituents. I was at a school closure meeting earlier tonight, where there were several hundred people. Even though the school closure was top of their mind, a number of them wanted to take the opportunity to talk to me about the direction that the government is going and encouraged me to continue our efforts to try to protect pensions for people who work in public jobs. In fact, in northeast Edmonton, that I represented for nearly 25 years at two different levels of government, there's a large number of people who are public employees, either working for the city or the province or other agencies – Alberta Health, for example – and the schools. They're very aware of Bill 9, and they're very concerned about Bill 9.

I'm not sure that people have yet heard as much about Bill 10. But for those employees, for example, who work in Refinery Row – there are lots of them that live in northeast Edmonton; they live in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's riding and in mine – there will be a lot of concern. Many of those operations are unionized and have large private-sector union membership, and they have their own pension plans.

It was interesting that when we contacted Unifor, the union that represents so many of these workers, they had not been consulted. That's a former Canadian energy and paperworkers union, one of the largest unions, and it merged with the Canadian Auto Workers to form a new, large union called Unifor. It represents many of the refinery workers just on the eastern border of the city. There certainly is a substantial stake for those workers in this particular piece of legislation, and I think that they should know about it before the Legislature passes it. But I think that at this rate that won't happen, and I think that that's wrong.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: To speak to the amendment, Madam Speaker?

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Is there anybody else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, Madam Speaker, as the hon. member may be surprised to know, I cannot accept the amendment. We encourage all members here to not vote for this amendment because of what it says. It says, "The bill forces unilateral changes to pension schemes that endanger the health of the plans and restricts transparency." That's a misrepresentation of the facts and is not anywhere close to the facts of this particular bill.

The House will be reminded, I guess, of some of the comments that I made when we introduced second reading, that this particular amendment comes from something that was done in the fall of 2012. The proposed act will amend the Employment Pension Plans Act, which was passed by this Assembly, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rightly pointed to, with

support, I might add, Madam Speaker, from all parties in the fall of 2012.

The act then was actually based on recommendations of the 2008 report that was put forward by the Joint Expert Panel on Pension Standards. Madam Speaker, the panel was struck when the governments of Alberta and British Columbia appointed a variety of experts to look into ways to harmonize and modernize the two provinces' private-sector pension legislation. This is part of the recommendations that the panel came forward with.

As part of their recommendations the panel proposed a new type of pension plan called the target benefit plan and suggested that the rules be developed to allow defined benefit plans in the private sector to retroactively convert accrued defined benefits into targeted benefits. In fact, Madam Speaker, the idea of union plans or collectively bargained plans is actually already in the act. In fact, what we said when we introduced this legislation and what we have said all along is that the regulation will include a clause that stipulates that plan members must be in agreement before a conversion can happen. Let me repeat that: the plan members must be in agreement before a conversion can happen.

In fact, a threshold of agreement must be met in order for that conversion to take place. That means, Madam Speaker, that plan members will be consulted, and if a significant portion of the members disagree with the conversion, it cannot go through. So the fear and the fearmongering that has been going on over on the other side obviously is, you know, pandering to their stakeholder group – they think it is their stakeholder group – for votes, which is unfortunate.

Madam Speaker, I've talked a lot in this House about the fact that defined benefit plans, targeted benefit plans, pension plans in this province need to be helped to foster, to grow, to be sustainable because we want more people on pension plans for exactly the reasons that the hon. members opposite have talked about. In fact, we talk about encouraging employers to create plans and pension plans so that their employees can be rewarded in their retirement years and so that they have something that's there. In fact, you know, there have been good definitions of what defined contribution plans and defined benefit plans and targeted benefit plans are.

One of the hon. members said: well, your DC plan could be retroactively changed. Hardly, Madam Speaker, because a defined contribution plan is exactly that; it's your contributions into the plan. The problem with it is that when the amount that you set aside is gone, it's done. You have nothing.

Defined benefit plans, on the other hand, are there for life. Regardless of what you contributed, you have the amount that's there. We are not doing anything in Bill 9 or Bill 10 that will change that pension promise. In fact, Madam Speaker, what we are doing in both of these bills is ensuring that companies and the public sector can afford to sustainably provide those kinds of pensions and those kinds of benefits to their members.

Frankly, Madam Speaker, for one who does not have a defined benefit plan or a targeted benefit plan, for that matter, I look at this and think to myself: why would somebody over there want to put at tremendous risk – tremendous risk – defined benefit plans or targeted benefit plans by saying, "Don't do anything"? When you look at all of the examples across North America where they didn't do anything, now they are having to do a great deal. Most of those plan members are losing benefits because governments failed to act. Opposition to their action caused the failure of those plans.

11:50

Madam Speaker, this government will not fail to act to protect the defined benefit pension plans, the targeted benefits for employers to offer to their employees, by inaction. We are going to take modest steps to ensure that there is a defined benefit pension plan for their workers in the future. The opposition can fearmonger all they want. The facts don't lie. The Auditor General did not lie when he said that we had to take action now to protect these plans, to deal with these plans, and to deal with this issue.

New Brunswick didn't take action when they should have, and members there are losing benefits. The state of Maine almost went bankrupt because they didn't take action. The state of New Jersey is 64 per cent funded because they didn't take action. They're having to now.

Madam Speaker, it is our duty as the trustees of the public to ensure that people have pensions in the future. It is our duty to ensure that we provide the framework so that plans today can be sustainable into the future. That is why I will not accept a motion to do nothing, and I will not accept the opposition's argument that doing nothing will save the plans. We need to take action, and we need to do it now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Mr. Dorward: Sure.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is when you question . . .

Mr. Dorward: The minister?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, the minister.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. That's kind of what I thought I might do.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As a chartered accountant and somebody who has been following and studying and looking at pensions for my entire career, I just wanted to stand and say that I'm glad to be able to be on this side of the House, to be working with the government, with people who would care enough about the pensions and the future of pension sustainability in the province of Alberta such that the minister would do what he's done with Bill 10 and with Bill 9 as well, if I could speak to that. I ratify everything that the minister just said. In my experience and in my knowledge of 40 years in my career as a chartered accountant and a certified management accountant, this is the right thing for Alberta to do at this time.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Any further comment, Minister?

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. As a chartered accountant he sees a lot in the financial community in terms of what his clients would be looking at in their retirement. He also sees the benefits for those clients, I'm sure, who have defined benefit programs versus those who have defined contributions.

Madam Speaker, we've talked to people like the teachers' plan in Ontario, which is held up as the gold standard – the hon. members opposite might want to listen to this part – for many of the unions and the plans that they're in in Canada. Even the

teachers' plan had to make changes to the COLA to make it conditional as opposed to guaranteed because they understand that, moving forward, as the plans mature, there have to be more levers than just taking more money from people's cheques, that there have to be more levers in order to make sure that the pension promise is there.

It's interesting that when we talked to Jim Leech, who wrote the book *The Third Rail* – and I think somebody over in the Liberal caucus was actually quoting from some of the history in the book. I hope she read the rest of it, because the rest of it said: don't crater defined benefit pension programs as per the Wildrose option; actually change it so the variables are there so they can manage it in the good times and in the negative times of returns. The whole concept of the book – prior to reading it, I didn't think it was – is how you defend and preserve defined benefit programs for Albertans, for Canadians. Frankly, Madam Speaker, a lot of what we're doing didn't come from the book, but it has actually been backed up by what is in that book. It's also been backed up by what good pension plans in this country and beyond are doing today to ensure the sustainability of those plans going forward.

I look at the teachers' plan, and I say: there's a plan, that several of the hon. members opposite should be aware of if they're not, that has joint sponsorship. When I met with the unions last week and we talked about the joint sponsorship discussion that we're going to start, I actually suggested: "Why don't we look at that as the model? It's agreed to in Ontario by the teachers' union, it's agreed to by the payer, if you will, and the joint sponsorship is there. Why don't we look at that as the model? Why don't we bring experts that have been there and done that to say that they have saved their defined benefits and their future for their pension plan? Why don't we bring them out to Alberta to sit down and talk to us? You know, maybe our contribution cap should be arranged like they did in New Brunswick." We're open to that. But I'll come back to this, Madam Speaker.

To do nothing is to not fulfill the duty that we have to employees today, the employees of the past, and the employees of the future. We will not do nothing, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Speaking on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Indeed. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, you know, that all sounds compelling, but with all due respect, I think the Minister of Finance is really overselling his case, and in so doing, I think he undermines his argument just a touch.

You know, first of all, no one has ever said, the unions themselves have not said: do nothing. The unions have said: negotiate. But this is not negotiation, what you're doing right now. Whether there are tweaks that can be made to enhance the security of the sustainability is an issue that's up in the air, but there has been no negotiation. This is legislation. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous, I would say.

As well, I would say that on your suggestion that we are fearmongering, all I can do is read the legislation to you. Prior to the amendment what we had was a section that allowed for certain changes to plans in the case where the plan was

a negotiated cost plan or a jointly sponsored plan and the plan text document of the plan does not contain a target benefit provision, [they] may, with the written consent of the Superintendent, amend the plan text document to reduce benefits.

And then it goes on to suggest that they can reduce or eliminate benefits, that they can reduce the benefit under the targeted benefit

provision that was intended to be paid, and they can increase the amount of the contributions. That's what was there before.

Now, if what the minister is saying is true, that all we want to do is make sure that under targeted benefit plans we have flexibility and that we are absolutely not at all interested in scooping away defined benefit plans, then it would not be necessary to add the following clause to that section of the act:

If the plan text document of the plan contains a defined benefit provision, [we can] amend the plan text document to convert, in accordance with the rules prescribed [elsewhere], the defined benefit provision to a target benefit provision, which conversion may apply to accrued benefits,

which is another way of saying: retroactive conversion. That's what your act says.

Let's be very clear. Your act is creating the authority to convert from a defined benefit plan. That's what your act is doing. Don't tell us that we're fearmongering because that's what this is all about. That is the crux of this bill. That is what we were advised by your staff. The crux of this bill is to ensure that there is the ability to convert defined benefit plans to targeted benefit plans according to a certain set of rules.

Now, previously the minister also said: well, you know, we're not going to go around converting defined benefit plans to targeted benefit plans on a whim. Presumably, it would only happen if it was the last resort or if there were serious circumstances. I can't remember his exact language, but that was the implication. Well, you know, I followed the trail. I went to section 112, and then I went to section 159, and you know what? There are no rules anywhere – anywhere – in this piece of legislation that prescribe the circumstances under which that conversion can occur. It doesn't say that the plan is at risk of going under tomorrow. It doesn't say that there are absolutely no resources to pay out the benefits. It doesn't say any of those things. So the circumstances under which that conversion can occur are open to interpretation – or, no, not actually. They're open to the decision of cabinet, which will be made at some future time behind closed doors.

12:00

Now, the minister has suggested: "Oh, no. It's only under limited circumstances that we would do it. We promise." Well, with all due respect, Mr. Minister, you may not have noticed with Bill 45 and Bill 46, but your government has no credibility with working people in this province anymore. No one is going to trust you on that, and nobody is going to forgive us for giving you the authority to make up the rules for when you take a defined benefit plan away from a bunch of hard-working retirees and replace it with a targeted benefit plan. Nobody is ever going to forgive us for giving you guys the authority to do that, because you've lost their trust. You've fundamentally and completely lost their trust. You went so far as to arbitrarily and gratuitously breach the Charter of Rights and Freedoms just because you were so keen on beating up on working people. Somebody's having a temper tantrum, so then we decided we needed to express that through sort of the gratuitous breach of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

There was no strategic objective to that, but there was an outcome in our little outcome-based world. The outcome was that there was no credibility or trust or faith in that cabinet to make decisions about when targeted benefit plans will replace defined benefit plans for hard-working, long-suffering, long-contributing regular Albertans, who simply thought: "You know what? I went to work. I showed up. I went home. I do my job. I go every day. I pay my contributions. I make my plans. They're not big plans. I

don't have houses in Canmore. I don't have free flights to Jasper. I don't get to vacation at the JPL just whenever because it's part of my job perks." They just go to work every day. They make their contributions. They plan their modest retirement for the end of that contribution period, and they think that there was a contract and a promise and a handshake and they can expect to be treated with respect and dignity.

This act makes it very clear that you are giving yourself authority to undo that, to change that bargain, to undo that handshake, and to threaten that modest, secure retirement. The only answer that you can give is: "Don't worry. We'll make regulations to make sure it doesn't happen in too arbitrary of a fashion." But, my friends, I'm sorry. I don't know. There are a lot of Conservative governments, frankly, across this country that could make that argument to working people, but I know for sure that this government is the last one that could make that argument to working people.

It is shocking to me, really, that you folks over there don't get that, that you actually think that this is a strategically wise path to follow. Going after working people arbitrarily, gratuitously, for no good reason to ensure that you keep their raises at zero per cent at a time when the cost-of-living in this province is 2 or 2.1 or 2.2 per cent, to suppress their wages and to do that while also bringing in legislation that breaches the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and also breaches their freedom of speech and also fines them into the Stone Age: you do all that stuff gratuitously because someone was having a temper tantrum. I have to think that it was a temper tantrum generated initiative because it certainly was not strategically considered by anybody with a good political nose. You do that, and then you bring on this: "Hey, you know what? We need to find a way to ease the transition from a defined benefit plan to a targeted benefit plan."

So the minister is simply not correct when he suggests that we are fearmongering. Madam Speaker, what we are doing is reading the legislation. If they think the legislation means something else, then they should write it to mean something else. If they are not happy with the way that we are interpreting the legislation, then they should refer this piece of legislation and not proceed any further. Sit down and actually consult with those 70,000 unrepresented non-union employees who stand to lose their defined pension plan without any consideration, consultation, or notice that this is even happening.

What they should do is go back to the drawing board, write the language the way they apparently think they mean it, and talk to the folks whose lives will be fundamentally changed if this permissive piece of legislation goes forward and hands off that kind of authority to this cabinet and to employers.

They should go back and they should consult with them because this is a mistake. This is a mistake. This is a mistake being made by a government that has really not done a whole heck of a lot but make a whole bunch of mistakes, repeatedly alienating people across the province, repeatedly justifying excesses, justifying overpayments, justifying communications management of objective internal FOIP reviews, justifying everything as though it's all okay while at the same time going after regular working people time and time again. It just doesn't make sense.

I mean, I want to give you guys advice. You know, politically you're not positioning yourselves in a thoughtful way, not at all. But, more importantly, what you're doing is taking yet another run at regular working folks. You are setting up another group of people whose retirement security will become unsecure and whose income stability will become unstable, who will spend less in their rural communities, who will contribute less to their local economies, who will rely more on their children and their children's children

for care and for income support, who will put more pressure on our health care system because, as we've already covered earlier tonight, when people are poor, they become more unhealthy and they make a bigger demand on our health care system. This is what you do when you remove security of retirement.

The great thing about most Albertans is that they don't live like these folks over here. They don't just sort of take as a matter of right a plane ride to the JPL and to here and to there and: "Oh, you know, I don't want to drive. I'll just fly on our private jet." That's not their world. The fact of the matter is that on a very modest retirement income, a very modest one, they can actually plan to live well. They can plan to put food on the table. They can plan to make sure that they've got a roof over their heads. They can plan to make sure that they've got enough money put aside to give the grandkids Christmas presents. They can do all that without drawing on social resources while continuing to contribute to the community. They can do that on a very small fraction of the amount of money that these folks seem to think is an entitlement that they need to live on.

All we need to do is to let them do it. All we need to do is to give them certainty and say: "Carry on the way you've been going before. Continue contributing to the community. Continue volunteering. Continue buying your groceries at your local store at the end of Main Street in your small town in rural Alberta. Continue doing all those things, and we'll support you because we know that you are what this community is based on. This is how we grow our communities and provide healthy communities. That's what we do."

But what you do instead is say: "Guess what? You may or may not have this much money when you retire. Next month you may not have this money. The month after that you might have a bit more. Two months after that you might have a bit less. We needed to do this because, you know, Suncor was at risk of defaulting on the defined benefit pension plan, and we know how at risk Suncor is. So it was really important for us to ensure that we never ask Suncor to raise their contributions." That's what you're doing. You're making choices, and the choice that you are making is not favouring regular Albertans. That's why you should reject this bill and vote in favour of our amendment.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, are you on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Eggen: On 29(2)(a), yes, Madam Speaker, please.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you very much. That was a very interesting and illuminating speech. I notice you cleared out some of the people. Their ears were burning so much that they just had to get out for a while from under the radiance of that analysis.

But there was one part there that I just wanted to know more about. I'm quite flabbergasted. My impression from the Finance minister's speech, which was actually pretty good, too – it didn't have a lot there, but it sounded good. He seemed to be hanging so much of his argument on the idea that the employees, if they wanted to move from a defined benefit plan to a targeted, would have to all agree first or, he said, like, a significant number of them or something like that. Where in the legislation is that supported? That seems to be the key thing that says: oh, well, everybody has to be agreed and happy about moving from a defined benefit to a target before it goes forward. Is that actually supported in the legislation?

12:10

Ms Notley: Well, that's really a very good question because, in fact, that goes back to the discussion we had before, and the answer is no. It is clearly not laid out in the legislation. In circumstances where there is a union representing the members at a particular site with a particular pension plan, presumably the union does have the internal process at their disposal to ensure that their members agree. The fact of the matter, though, is that this does not just apply to unionized settings. It also applies to where there are no unionized employees, and then, Member for Edmonton-Calder, what we are being asked to do is, once again, trust that this government will come up with a set of rules through regulation that ensures proper consultation with those employees.

Interestingly, there's another section of the legislation that actually reduces the obligation for service and notice on employees and makes it much simpler. You can just send notice to the last address we had 10 years ago and, you know, that kind of thing. So they're already opening the door to reduce any sort of consultative obligation.

We don't know what a significant number of employees is. Is it 20 per cent? Is it 50? Is it 75? We don't know. That's a decision that they're going to make. We don't know how much they have to be told before they're asked. We're not told what information they're going to be given, how objectively that information will be put before them, or if it will just be presented by the employer that wants to get away from having to increase their contributions. We know none of those answers. It's all left to regulation. The fact of the matter is that it's another "trust us." Again, it just goes back to my initial statement. I don't get that you guys wouldn't understand that asking employees to trust you is just not on. You've done nothing to earn that trust. Nothing to earn that trust. Yeah, that's all I can say.

There is, actually, nothing in this legislation that ensures significant and appropriate consultation on the part of non-unionized employees, and frankly there are even some questions about what it would look like with the unionized sector, but my bigger concern at this point is the many non-union employees that are covered by these changes, for whom there are no guarantees written anywhere in this legislation.

Mr. Eggen: So you're saying that there's a "trust in me" kind of thing. You know, it came to me. This member is not that great with cultural allusions – right? – but there's that scene in the *Jungle Book* where Mowgli is talking to the giant snake. The giant snake is trying to get him up into the tree, and he just says: trust in me. He's got a song that he sings like that. Of course, the snake does not have the best intentions of the public in mind, really, but says come on up. It just came to my mind.

Well, you know, it seems like bills 9 and 10 are very closely linked in that we're moving the power of decision-making from the boards, from – correct me if I'm wrong – a consultative process, from the employees to executives and cabinet. So is that the link I'm seeing between 9 and 10, or am I missing something?

Mr. Mason: The snake's name was Kaa.

Ms Notley: Thank you, because I couldn't really have gone on with an answer to that question without knowing the snake's name, and I think that's . . .

Mr. Eggen: Well, from the *Jungle Book*.

Ms Notley: From the *Jungle Book*. It's important to understand. Kaa. If I knew the tune I'd sing it, but . . .

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak to the amendment?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, on the amendment. Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I'm sort of two minds with this amendment because in some ways it's such a gift that not only – well, with Bill 9 it was such an egregious, obvious, and sort of vengeful attack on the public sector that the only problem that we were sort of having in trying to work through how we're going to talk about this is that, well, we know that the members opposite will hit back and say, "oh, well, you're just trying to defend the public sector, and they have these giant pensions and all that kind of thing," which is not true at all. The average draw for a public service pension is between \$13,000 and \$15,000 per annum, not per month like some of you might think, right? They would try to say: oh, well, there is only 15 per cent of the population that has that public service pension. Along comes Bill 10, lo and behold, where they go after the whole thing, where any defined benefit pension that might exist somewhere on the horizon in the province of Alberta suddenly goes into the gunights of this same government.

I mean, it's not good at all, Madam Speaker, this whole thing. The only reason that I would let them carry on is that you give a person – what's the analogy? I'm full of analogies late into the night. You give somebody enough rope, and they will . . .

Mr. Bilous: Hang themselves.

Mr. Eggen: . . . hang themselves. Exactly. This whole thing really does that.

I just think that we are actually doing this government a favour by saying, "Okay; well, just pull back a little bit" because the scope by which you are aggravating the working population of this province here with Bill 9 and Bill 10 goes far beyond your favourite target, which seems to be unionized employees, who actually organize themselves and create a certain power base to create some sort of enhanced benefit for not only their own members but for the rest of the population, too. Don't forget that when there exists a proper unionized . . .

[Mr. Jeneroux in the chair]

Mr. Bilous: Look at the Speaker.

Mr. Eggen: Holy Toledo. There you go.

Where there exists a strong union presence, then even the non-unionized workers gain some benefit, the classic examples being Suncor and Syncrude, right? The idea that you would go ahead with this Bill 10, where anybody who has managed to pull together a defined benefit pension – and don't forget that those are negotiated and organized not just by the workers but by the employers, too, to attract workers into their place because this is part of what you negotiate. It's part of the person's wages. And it's not just the wages, but it's that intangible but very important thing, which is a sense of security for the future, right? Because, Mr. Speaker – enjoy it while you're up there – all power is brief, let me tell you. He looks good up there, though.

The whole issue around these pensions is not just the money, the very modest sum that you can look forward to in your retirement, but the security as you work through your entire working life to know that that's going to be there and that the terms of that are defined in a way that you can be secure about and that you can make plans for in the future. If you change the rules, Mr. Speaker, in the middle of the game, you are not just breaking a law; you're breaking an ethical tenet by which we function here

in our society, and that is a sense of security and a sense of a contract between the working people that signed up for a defined benefit and the employer that did sign up for that, too.

This is a way by which somebody can change the rules. Mr. Speaker, when do we think, really, that the rules are going to be changed? It's not going to be in the midst of wine and roses and, you know, when everybody is doing great. No. It's going to be when a business is not doing well, and they're not doing well because they're short of money. When they're short of money, where is the first place that they're going to go? They'll go for the pensions, especially for the people that have already retired and are not working there anymore.

You know, the examples are legion amongst Canadian and international companies that have gone broke over time. The first people that get hit are the pensioners that already signed up. So if you create a mechanism by which you change those rules and allow the employer to make those changes to the rules, then you're just asking for trouble, right? I don't have to go any further to give everyone a very lugubrious example in the very recent past where pensions were cast aside, and that word is "Nortel," where literally tens of thousands of people suddenly had the rope pulled out from under them. Lots and lots of people lost their jobs, yes, but the very first people to lose were the pensioners, who lost their benefits.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Finance minister said – I've heard him say this before, you know, and this is a very hollow argument – well, where do you think the money is going to come from? Well, if you organize something in a responsible way and you know that the law is standing there that's going to compel you to pay that pension and they're not going to be able to change those rules in the midst, Madam Speaker, then you're just going to organize yourself and make sure that you follow those rules and not be so cavalier about your business and about your pension responsibilities, that you are not going to be able to pay them.

12:20

Yes, of course, some businesses do fail in time, and some businesses are more successful or less successful than others. But if you have strong, solid rules that compel a business to ensure that they stay with the pension benefit that they had signed their employees up for, then that's going to be more likely to create stability, not just for the pensions but for those businesses, too, and they're less likely to behave in a cavalier sort of way, especially when they get into a bit of trouble.

I'm just very glad that we are – you know, you should be glad, too, that we're giving you a little escape route here, right? This is nothing, no skin off anybody's back. We can all shake hands afterwards and talk about this reasoned amendment, moving this thing forward here. Unilateral changes are not good for anyone. They don't just affect the health of pension plans, but they can also affect the health of political parties that are already in a little bit of trouble, I would suggest. I mean, that's just friendly advice. I don't know. You can go your own way on that. But I think it's not unreasonable to just pull back here at the moment and face the sober light of dawn and perhaps find something else to go after. [interjection] It is coming up very soon, yes, it being spring and all.

I guess my main concern – if it wasn't for that one provision, really, Bill 10 could have functioned okay. I remember, in fact, being with the Finance minister a couple of years ago when you were sort of thinking about which way to go on these things, right? It's just not so unreasonable for people to make a choice

from the onset what sort of pension plan they want to draw from and so forth. You know, pensions are meant to go over a very long period of time. They can function and continue to function and maybe find some instability and regain their footing over a 30- or 40-year period.

Sometimes for human beings that's a hard thing to think of, but we do have to realize that. You have to look at the long-term demographics of your population. If you do not have young people investing into the pensions for the people that have already retired, then the whole scheme is gone. It doesn't matter how much money you've got banked out or whatever for the pension. That money will disappear very, very quickly if you don't have a continuous stream of new people to sign up for those pensions and, essentially, pay for the pensions of the people that have already retired.

Now, for most people that's not a big deal. It's great. We quite enjoy doing that. I was part of the teachers' pension. You know, you expect the same from what came before, right? But if you start to make these sorts of attacks like bills 9 and 10, not only are you destabilizing the people that might be looking for those pensions, but you are deterring younger people from investing and getting involved in those pensions in the first place. I find that the most despicable part of this whole little exercise here. That's the unsaid part of the whole thing, that you are dislodging the young people to join the pension plans in the first place, and thus the whole thing just crumbles like a sandcastle. It doesn't take much. It doesn't take long to burn through the money, like you say, if you have lots of retirees, and then suddenly, boom, you don't have a lot of young people starting to invest in it.

The second prong of that thing that you can use if you really want to be subversive is that you just stop hiring people with pensions on the public service side, and, lo and behold, there's not anybody investing in that front end to help pay for the back end. Why? Because you've shrunk the public service so much that, you know, it's just a shadow of what it was before. I mean, that's a sidebar, I suppose, to the central thing here with Bill 10, the idea that we just want to make a very reasoned amendment here from my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and move on to bigger and better things.

I certainly support this amendment. I think it's very timely, and I think that everybody will walk away feeling better if they do support this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* on the amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in support of the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, which states, "Bill 10, Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the bill forces unilateral changes to pension schemes that endanger the health of the plans and restricts transparency and decision-making authority for members."

On the face of it I have to support this amendment. I listened to the arguments put forward by the hon. minister of Treasury Board as well as the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Don't get me wrong; both were impassioned speeches. Nevertheless, when one looks at the legislation and how it is worded and the real result of what this Bill 10 does, which, in my view, essentially is a companion bill to

Bill 9, that serves as an attack on working people and what they can expect to get in retirement, this bill sort of serves to take away the defined benefit plans that people had paid into for their lives at the stroke of a pen or the passing of this bill.

You must remember that the hon. minister stated that this would be subject to some form of negotiation, that you'd have to get employees and employers together outside and that this wouldn't be done willy-nilly or at the drop of a hat, that it would only be used in some sort of limited situations.

I, too, then went to the legislation. Primarily, this is in section 20. As it's amended in the new reading of the bill, it says:

- (d) if the plan text document of the plan contains a defined benefit provision, may amend the plan text document to convert, in accordance with the rules prescribed for the purposes of section 112, the defined benefit provision to a target benefit provision, which conversion may apply to accrued benefits.

If you follow the bouncing ball along over to section 112 and further on in the bill, there is no reference to any type of consultation, any type of agreement, any type of meeting of the minds that must take place between employees and employers when this so-called move happens when you go from a defined benefit plan to a target benefit plan as the minister suggested in his comments was the actual way the new Bill 10 was going to work. In no way, shape, or fashion does this appear on the face of the bill. Now, I do say that the minister did say that this would be contained in regulation. You know, I guess that could happen, but I guess that it couldn't either. In particular, I don't think people who are part of these plans would have much confidence in the government doing anything on behalf of the working men and women of this province. Simply put, if I was a working person, I would come to the exact opposite conclusion.

If we look at what's happened since that election in 2012, we've seen an unprecedented attack on public-sector workers, and now we have it even on private-sector plans. Now, it is true that some people affected by the changes of this bill will have a union to represent them to, I guess, discuss these plans and negotiate them and go back to the drawing board on these things, which is something they've already negotiated. But it's my understanding that there are 70,000 non-unionized employees who will be affected by this and, in my view, the way this legislation is written, could have but more likely will have at some point in time in the very near future their pension plans moved from a defined benefit plan to a target, which in no way, shape, or form will serve them in the same way going forward.

12:30

We've been through this before, but I think it's important to understand that defined benefit plans ensure that people have a set, predictable, sustainable retirement. I think those were a lot of buzzwords around the last election: predictable, sustainable funding. It would seem to be a goal that this government promised and wanted to deliver on and the like. Sure enough, you'd think they'd want it for retirees, but by enacting this type of legislation, that certainly is not going to be the case.

I have to also comment that I believe the political calculation here in the way the government has acted since being elected is completely backwards. I think they actually had it right in the 2012 election. They understood that the province had changed, that it actually wanted to have, you know, schools in neighbourhoods where kids live. They wanted to move away from what had been sort of described as a slow to move government that was very right-wing and was not implementing progressive alternatives to support, I guess, frankly, the people on the margins,

the working people of this province, who got the short end of the stick for quite a few years.

But I think the political calculation is all wrong in this. Instead of following through on that – I think they were right to understand to want to move towards fixing a fiscal structure that was broken, to fixing a lot of our social benefits that were teetering, to fixing the direction of public education, and moving towards full-day kindergarten and things like that, that other provinces had gone to – they instead said: “Oh, my goodness. Despite winning a majority going after a centrist vote, let's go for the votes that we already lost.” For some inexplicable reason this party did that, and in my view, it was unwise, silly. Nevertheless, bills like this seem to suggest – or not even suggest; verify – that that's the direction they're going in. In attacking regular working people and attacking the benefits that they have worked for, that they were hoping for in their retirement in both the public-sector and now the private-sector pension plans, I really don't know where they think they got their mandate from.

In any event, I think this motion would actually go some way for us to allow us to move to have this bill stopped here at this time, allow the government to get their bearings and assess whether this is truly in this province's best interest and to actually look at whether or not, if we want to continue down this path, we have in this province bills 45, 46, now 9 and 10, which are, in my view, attacks on regular working people, people who maybe, you know, are not working in the high-paying oil and gas sector or maybe not in the sort of category of income that the flat tax benefits but nevertheless they've negotiated a reasonable retirement through a defined benefit plan. That's what they went into, and they did so to hope for a reasonable retirement.

In any event, that's why I'm supporting this. I appreciated the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointing out that this bill, Bill 10, does not contain any of the things that allegedly were supposed to be there, where employees and employers would come to a meeting of the minds to discuss as to whether you'd move the defined benefit pension plan to a targeted benefit plan in these situations. This is not present in the legislation. Accordingly, I have no confidence that it will be there. As it is, on its face, the legislation in front of us is just a way to convert defined benefit plans to targeted benefit plans, which will impact the average employee in a negative way in their retirement years.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

On Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, is there any other member interested in debating the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of this amendment for a number of reasons, which I will outline here. Again, to remind members, this amendment is quite simply stating that Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time.

The reasons behind this are really why it is a reasonable and reasoned amendment. This bill does force unilateral changes to pension schemes, which can and will endanger the health of the plans yet at the same time also restrict transparency and decision-making authority for its members.

Now, a large reason of how the decision-making authority will be restricted is because, again, this bill as it is currently written means that the minister will have the ability to change pension plans that were already negotiated in the past, that have been in

place for years if not decades for some. These pensions were part of the agreement that workers made with their employer as part of their compensation for their work. It seems absurd that an agreement that was made over the span of decades, where what an employee was under the impression, was promised, they would be getting in their retirement can suddenly change for no reason other than the minister decides that the plans need to change. Maybe the minister is lobbied by said company. Regardless, the outcome is that this worker has devoted their life to this company, to their employer, again, under the assumption that they're going to be compensated, and the compensation came in how they were going to be paid in wages, in benefits, and, again, in retirement.

Part of where pensions came from was rewarding loyalty to employees for staying with a company. Again, you know, I think what this government is forgetting or overlooking is the importance of retirement security and knowing that you're going to be able to afford to continue to live whereas when changes are made on the fly or at a moment's notice, this is going to put unbelievable pressure on folks, especially because of its retroactive ability. That, to me, just boggles my mind, Madam Speaker, that something that was signed and agreed to for years if not decades can suddenly be changed. I mean, it's outrageous, quite frankly.

12:40

You know, I want to also talk about this attack, and it is, quite frankly, an attack on working Albertans, between Bill 9 and Bill 10. Again, this is where bills 9 and 10 are just dripping with irony. We had some of the most severe flooding in Alberta's history happen last year. The people who were on the scene first, our front-line workers, people who came from all over the province to assist with families and the emergency workers in southern Alberta, were praised by this government, by every member in this House over and over for their work, their dedication, their sacrifice of themselves, their own health, their own families in order to assist fellow Albertans, which was extremely noble. Many of us if not all of us were extremely proud of our fellow Albertans.

Now, where the irony comes in, Madam Speaker, is that Bill 9 and Bill 10 along with bills 45 and 46 are how this PC government repays those very same front-line workers: wage freezes, wage rollbacks, now attacking their pensions. I mean, it's quite clear that this government's agenda is to hollow out and offend all of the very same workers that work in their offices, which help make this province go round on a day-to-day basis.

I'm quite frustrated with this, but I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's amendment in that this bill is terrible. It doesn't actually say that although it really could. We're saying: let's not read this bill for a second time. You know, again, part of the issues are the unilateral changes that can be made, should the minister so desire, with the stroke of a pen, and that's just not right.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'd like to just read – and I have dictionary here – the definition of negotiate because this government doesn't seem to get negotiate. [interjections] I am planning to. I need to wrap up this thought. This is extremely important. Excuse me, hon. members. I'm trying to read. Negotiate is trying “to reach an agreement or compromise by discussion” with others. Here's something that maybe the Finance minister missed. A negotiation is a discussion with others, not with yourself, not with your cabinet.

Mr. Eggen: Imaginary friends.

Mr. Bilous: Not with your imaginary friends. It's talking to the very folks who this legislation along with Bill 9 is going to affect. That is one of the reasons I think that so many public-sector workers and private-sector workers are quite upset with this legislation. They were not consulted. There was no negotiation. This is being forced. It's being forced on them. Madam Speaker, I feel it my duty to explain this to the Finance minister along with every member in the House.

I'll leave that there for now, Madam Speaker, although I would really like to say that I'm just warming up. Therefore, I strongly urge all members of the House to support this amendment and now not read Bill 10 for a second time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other speakers on the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 10 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We will go back to second reading of Bill 10. Are there any other members who wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Campbell: Madam Speaker, I'd ask for unanimous consent to go to one-minute bells, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:46 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Horner	Rodney
Bhullar	Hughes	Rowe
Campbell	Jansen	Sandhu
Cusanelli	Jeneroux	Sarich
Dallas	Johnson, L.	Starke
DeLong	Klimchuk	Strankman
Dorward	Luan	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Wilson
Fraser	McIver	Woo-Paw
Fritz	McQueen	Xiao
Hale	Oberle	Young
Horne	Quadri	

12:50

Against the motion:

Bilous	Hehr	Notley
Eggen	Mason	Swann
Totals:	For – 35	Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Mr. Campbell: Madam Speaker, it's late, so let's call it a morning, and we will adjourn until 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:51 a.m. on Wednesday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 23, 2014

Issue 22a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont (PC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Allen, Mike, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (Ind)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (W),
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Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Hon. Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND)
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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
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Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
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Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
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Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
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Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

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Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
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Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 23, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Let us be thankful for the opportunity given to us to meet daily in this Assembly for the service to others, and let us be mindful of the obligations we all have in that regard. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you members from my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. These members are from the Ridgevalley school. Accompanying these members today is Edi Harden, the schoolteacher. They are seated in the public gallery today. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly 51 grade 6 students, the brightest and the sharpest kids from Greenview school in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Cheri Krywko and Angela Sharun, and parent helpers Heather Pitts, Chrisaline Wiens, Terri Cuthill, Susan McFarlane, Terri White, Cathy Doty, Lisa Headrick, Rosalind Clarke, Patti Fersovitch, and Charlene Greenwood. I will request that you please all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks, I understand your guests are not here yet.

Let's go on to Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I get to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 47 students and parents and teachers from one of my favourite schools, Terrace Ridge, in Lacombe, Alberta. These incredibly bright students are accompanied by their teachers, Pat Jenkins and Mr. Brent Buchanan, and parent helpers Mr. Blair Andrew, Ms Weady Sanders, Mrs. Helga Reiner, Ms Jamie Nichols, Mrs. Verna Bawtenheimer, and Ms Wanda Guske. I would ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups or youth to be introduced?

If not, let us move on with other important guests, starting with the Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce 10 guests who are here seated in your gallery. Nine of them are the 2013 Daughters Day award recipients, and they're accompanied by the Daughters Day chairperson. Daughters Day is the initiative of the International Association of Citizens

for a Civil Society, a registered not-for-profit society in Alberta supported by more than 40 diverse community organizations. Daughters Day celebrates the lives and contributions and achievements of daughters. With us today is the cofounder of Daughters Day and its current chairperson, Charan Khehra. Now, I might say with some note that I had the pleasure and privilege of running in an election against Charan several elections ago. As is the case in Edmonton-Whitemud, it's always a friendly affair, and after the affair is over, we get to work together in the best interests of the community.

With him today are the 2013 Daughters Day award recipients: Rebecca Fitzsimmons, who opened a licensed preschool in Savanna and is implementing the food for thought school breakfast nutrition program; April Lam, a gifted young athlete representing Alberta in the 2013 Canada Summer Games and in the 2014 national Special Olympics in swimming; Shawnay McRorie, a recipient of the John Humphrey youth human rights award, committed to working with young children and adults living with disabilities; Christina Nsaliwa, a strong advocate of human services and inspirational mentor for women; Andrea Payne and Corissa Tymafichuk, grade 11 students from Paul Kane high school in St. Albert with a lifetime mission to help survivors of human trafficking and who organized a city-wide community walk, raising \$5,000; Laura Smith, an ESL instructor, motivated and instructed over 600 individuals, improving their level of proficiency in English; Linda Winski, a social justice advocate, opened her home to the community, providing friendship, hospitality, prayer, and a listening ear; and April Wiberg, a proud member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and a founding member of Edmonton Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk, was not able to join us today.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all of my Legislature colleagues to honour the presence of these award winners with the usual warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome.

The Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this House a constituent of mine from Calgary-Northern Hills, Lawrence Connell, who has travelled here to visit the Legislature and observe question period. Lawrence has served our province as a registered nurse for 35 years and has worked in corrections as well as for various regional and provincial health authorities since 1985. Lawrence is also on the board of directors for the Calgary Workers' Resource Centre, a nonprofit organization that helps Calgaryans understand and access their rights under various employment legislations. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Alberta Legislature representatives from the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association, here in recognition of their role in over 30 years of promoting and supporting Mandarin language programming through the Edmonton public school system. Also attending are grade 6 Mandarin language students from Kildare elementary school accompanied by their teacher. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise as I mention their names.

I would like to welcome from the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association board of directors Mr. Stephen Tsang, president and parent of an alumni from Edmonton public schools' Chinese bilingual program and has a child enrolled at Parkview school; Ms Angie Loo, vice-president and parent of children enrolled at Kildare elementary school and Londonderry junior high school; Mr. John Yee, past president, involved since 1997, and parent of alumni from the program; Mr. Wei Wong, past president, involved since 1988, and parent of alumni from the program; Mr. Peter Wong, who sends his regrets, past president, involved since 1989, and parent of alumni from the program. The grade 6 Kildare elementary school representatives include teacher Ms Remina Chen and students Henry Chiem, Jessica Fang, Bowei Huang, and with regret Vienna Chen could not join the group today. I would now ask that the Assembly please honour all my guests with the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Associate Minister – Seniors.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly board members of the Olde Towne Beverly Historical Society. The Olde Towne Beverly Historical Society was formed in 2005 to preserve the history of the town of Beverly, Alberta. The society began when members published their first book on Beverly's early years, *Built on Coal*, in the year 2000. Today the society engages in numerous activities to promote and share Beverly's history. The society runs annual pancake breakfasts, historical carriage rides, a pop-up interpretive centre, and social events. I'd like to highlight their exceptional efforts to offer educational school programs to teach local students about Beverly's coal-mining history. The society is hard at work planning community events for Beverly's 100th anniversary. I will ask my guests to rise as I call their names and remain standing: President Dan Vriend, Amanda Harriman-Gotjan, Edie Boonstra, Alene Carter, Bertha Pisarchuk, Ray Loga, Darlene Schlotter, John Henker, and Zenovia Rockwell. Please join me in giving them the warm traditional welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Seniors, followed by Calgary-West.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests who join us today to watch the House proceedings. First is Tammy Leach. Tammy is the executive director of the Alberta Continuing Care Association, which is a nonprofit, voluntary organization representing the providers of continuing care services in Alberta. The Alberta Continuing Care Association collaborates with other associations and organizations in Alberta and across Canada to share information, ideas, and resources. Joining Tammy is her nephew Jonathan Moore, who is visiting here from Strathmore and has a keen interest in politics. I know he was very excited to join us today. Tammy and Jonathan are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they both rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Kathleen Hamnett, a constituent of Calgary-West. Kathleen is the

vice-president of local 115 of the United Nurses of Alberta. As you know, there are 26,000 members in the United Nurses of Alberta, who together with the 100,000 Albertans who are part of the health care delivery service in this province do exceptional work day in, day out on behalf of all Albertans. Kathleen is seated in the members' gallery, and I ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have two minutes each for these statements. Let's start with the Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Provincial Election Anniversary

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been exactly two years since the last provincial election, and I think it's a great opportunity to reflect and to look ahead. This PC government was re-elected on promises to balance the budget and stay out of debt without a single budget cut to the front lines. Not much more needs to be said about that. Debt levels will soon reach early-1990s levels, and the cuts to the front lines have been swift and harsh and unrelenting.

They were re-elected on a promise to build 50 new schools and renovate 70 more. Well, here we are, two years down the road, without a single shovel in the ground, lots of signs but no shovels. And another one bites the dust.

They were re-elected on a promise of double-funding to municipalities. Instead, they froze funding. Oops. Full-day kindergarten? Nah. Teachers' tax credit to help buy school supplies? Nope. Seniors' activity tax credit? Try again. Tuition refunds for rural physicians? Sorry; no dice on that one either. You name a promise, Mr. Speaker, and it's probably been broken. Such is life in PC Alberta. Promises aren't meant to be kept; they're meant to get you re-elected.

On top of the broken promises, we have seen more scandal and taxpayer abuse than ever before: lavish expenses, luxury travel, penthouse apartments, and more sweetheart insider deals than there are days in a year. It's a major reason why the PC leader that was there in 2012 in the campaign is gone and why once again Albertans will watch as the PC Party tries to pick a new saviour. Best of luck to the poor soul who gets that job, Mr. Speaker. Whoever takes over the leadership of that party across the aisle will step into an impossible task, rebuilding broken trust with Albertans while attempting to shed the baggage that has brought down two Premiers in three years.

Albertans are ready for something entirely new. As we look back on two years' worth of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Beverly Centennial

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to mark a historic anniversary in my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'm proud to call Beverly my home and to represent the community in the Assembly in 2014, Beverly's centennial year.

In 1914 the coal-mining community northeast of Edmonton became the town of Beverly. *Built on Coal* tells the story of the remarkable people, coal mines, organizations, and merchants that

created and shaped Edmonton's working-class town. Beverly has always cherished our rich history. Rundle Heights and Rundle park are named after Reverend Robert Rundle, the first Protestant missionary to serve at Fort Edmonton Park. Abbottsfield and Abbott school are named after Abe Abbott, Beverly school's caretaker from 1922 to 1958. Allan Merrick Jeffers, the architect of the building we stand in today, built Beverly's first town hall. One of the Famous Five, Emily Murphy, worked in the Beverly town hall as the justice of the peace.

Mr. Speaker, after amalgamation with Edmonton in 1961, Beverly still retains its small-town feel. Neighbours know each other by name, look out for one another, and are proud of their community. New families are moving in, and their children are learning about the area's history from my guests today. Our small business community is thriving, with shops and restaurants opening their doors.

Beverly's centennial will be celebrated with activities for the whole community. Markers will be erected at historic mine sites, there will be a giant of Edmonton mural unveiled on May 1, and numerous activities over the summer, including a parade, pancake breakfast, concerts, carriage rides, and more. I encourage all members to visit beverlyhistory.ca. I invite all members to join Beverly centennial celebrations this summer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Chinese Bilingual Education in Edmonton

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans of Chinese ancestry have an extremely proud, valued, and equally long history, heritage, culture, and identity in our province. The Chinese population in Edmonton has grown along with our city, and they have developed strong organizations to assist them to promote and preserve all aspects of their heritage and culture.

One such organization is the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association, founded over 30 years ago by parent volunteers who were determined to support and help develop an internationally renowned Chinese Mandarin bilingual program offered by Edmonton public schools. Through this organization's effort the first Chinese Mandarin bilingual program was established in 1982, with 20 kindergarten students enrolled at Kildare elementary school, located in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore.

Today the district's Chinese Mandarin enrolment has grown to nearly 2,000 students at 12 school sites and is the largest in North America. The program is considered a model to emulate, and although most students come from Chinese backgrounds, it is attracting interest from others as no prior knowledge of the Chinese Mandarin language is required.

Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association has garnered many achievements, ranging from district recognition in 2008 to receiving the city of Edmonton salute to excellence award of distinction in 2009. Also, to showcase and share Chinese history and culture, all 12 Chinese bilingual schools along with other community groups have performed at the Chinese New Year carnival at City Centre Mall.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that culture is the window through which the rest of the world sees our great province. In that spirit, congratulations and heartfelt appreciation to all Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association parent volunteers and Edmonton public schools for their immeasurable contribution to

the teaching and learning experiences which embrace Chinese heritage and culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Cancer Awareness Initiatives in Wanham

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this Legislature we all wore daffodils to increase awareness of those who have cancer, and we were encouraged to become involved in a variety of ways. Well, there is a lady who has done a lot to inspire those around her by promoting the importance of cancer research and funding. Teresa Nuthall of Wanham in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley received much attention provincially last summer when she energized her community to become active in breast cancer awareness.

Attention to cancer awareness is what Ms Nuthall desired, and attention is what she received. Joining in the efforts of Wild Pink Yonder's Pinkest Little Town in the West cancer fundraiser, Wanham residents painted their towns – homes, porches, vehicles, and, yes, buildings – pink. Incredibly, the town of only 162 people managed to raise a staggering \$55,000 for breast cancer research during the bid to be named Pinkest Little Town in the West, which, by the way, they did receive. Even after the campaign came to a close, the community has continued to raise funds for breast cancer research. Last year they hosted a fun dance and A Pink Affair Christmas party. These events as well as others added considerably to their fundraising total.

Teresa Nuthall was a strong advocate for breast cancer research after losing her sister to the disease. Now because of her love for her family she's managed to increase breast cancer awareness in her community, in our constituency, and around the province.

Please join me in congratulating Ms Nuthall and the community of Wanham for their efforts to increase awareness and raise funds dedicated to breast cancer research.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll finish off Members' Statements after QP.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: You each have 35 seconds now for a question and 35 seconds for an answer. I'll do my best to enforce it. Let's start.

FOIP Request Process

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we released a leaked e-mail that raised concerns about the government undermining the integrity and independence of the freedom of information process by getting political staff to collect information on active FOIP requests. Now, the jobs minister claimed that the memo he wrote on November 23 was approved by the Information Commissioner, and he tabled the letter to try and prove it. Well, that letter does not endorse what the government is doing. In fact, it raises all of the same concerns that we have. To the Premier: why is this government politicizing the freedom of information process?

Mr. Hancock: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is that it's not. In fact, it is quite prudent for ministers to be aware of information that's being made public out of their departments. Actually, when that information is being made public, by definition it's public

information. It would be ludicrous to suggest that the only people who shouldn't know about it are the people who are responsible for it.

Ms Smith: I think the Premier needs to reread the memo because the Information Commissioner says that giving weekly reports to the Deputy Premier and the Premier goes too far. She says that it increases the potential risk of allegations of interference in the release of information. She also says that press secretaries are political appointees and that using them to develop key messages presents a potential perception that releases could be delayed until mitigating strategies and messages are developed. Why is the government ignoring the Information Commissioner?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this government would never ignore an officer of the Legislature. The officer of the Legislature was providing good advice: do not interfere politically as you engage in this process, and make sure that you're not doing something untoward with respect to the timing. She doesn't suggest for a moment that ministers should not be aware of the information that's going out and be prepared with appropriate, key messages. That's what the public of Alberta would expect the minister of the Crown to do, and that's what ministers of the Crown do.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the jobs minister told the media that at most a cabinet minister and his staff would get to see a FOIP release only five days before it was sent out. However – breaking news – CBC is reporting that the Health minister's political staff was writing talking points about an embarrassing information request two months before it was scheduled to be released. How is it that a political staffer in the Health minister's office got to see an Alberta Health Services FOIP request two months before it was released?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that's very interesting about the FOIP process is how it results in information, most often from the opposite side, being presented that's either inaccurate or out of context. In this case, as the Premier has clearly stated, ministers of the Crown bear the responsibility for the accurate and timely release of information pertaining to their departments in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That process is delegated by ministers to their deputy ministers and other officials. As the Premier has said, it is only reasonable that we are aware of what information is being released so that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second main set of questions, Leader.

Ms Smith: Keep on dancing, Minister. We'll have more questions on it tomorrow.

Health Care Performance Measures

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, over the last two weeks Wildrose has highlighted unprecedented levels of waste in Alberta Health Services. We've shown that they've wasted money on consultants and routinely sole source contracts that should have been open to competitive bids. Today we released a 68-page document about Edmonton and the capital region which shows what happens when AHS wastes money: patients get hurt. The data shows that on 15 tangible health targets AHS is below target and getting worse on 12 of them. Will the Premier admit that AHS is broken?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has just illustrated is the point I made in my answer to the last question. One of the benefits of the FOIP process is, of course, that it allows us to ensure that information is not presented that's inaccurate or out of context. That is the information the opposition is referring to. The performance measures today and that were published a month later from this release show some tremendous improvements in the health care system, including a reduction of 9 per cent and 15 per cent respectively for hip and knee surgery, significant reductions in waiting times for cardiac surgery. It also illustrates all of this being accomplished while volume increases across the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, health care workers are doing a great job in a broken system. It's the management and this government that are the problem.

This 68-page presentation shows that in Edmonton and the capital region on the vast majority of their key measures AHS is not only not hitting their targets, they are headed in the wrong direction. It's getting worse. Will the Health minister admit that he and AHS are letting down our front-line workers?

Mr. Horne: No. What I'll admit, Mr. Speaker, is that this hon. member and her colleagues are letting down Albertans and the health care system every time they present information inaccurately and out of context. The truth, which is readily available on the AHS website, is that we've seen a 2.7 per cent increase in the number of patients being discharged from hospital, meaning that we're seeing more patients; almost a week decrease for urgent cardiac bypass treatment; almost a four-week decrease in scheduled cardiac bypass wait times. The list goes on. This is a testament to success in health care in a population that is the fastest growing in Canada, and AHS deserves . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: The list does go on, Mr. Speaker. In 12 of those indicators they are getting worse, and they are not meeting their targets. It took a FOIP request to get this information, which should have been readily available.

If this government does everything in their power to hide the flaws in AHS, nothing is ever going to be fixed. We were promised that AHS would end waste and reduce wait times. Well, waste is up, wait times have never been longer, and this minister refuses to do anything about it. What does the Premier have to say to Albertans who have to wait for health care in a system that is wasting so much money?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have an incredibly complex health care system that delivers incredibly good service to Albertans on a day-to-day basis. If you talk to anybody who has had an acute situation, they will tell you – and I've talked to many Albertans – about the great service they get in the health system. We have a growing province, we have a growing demand, and we have a growing appetite for new services in the health system. The health system is working very hard and this minister is working very hard to ensure that Albertans get the health services they need when they need them.

The Speaker: Third main set of questions.

Public Service Pensions

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of our front-line workers, this government is unilaterally pushing through changes to public-sector pensions that have no support from the people who will be impacted. My questions are about the process and not about the legislation. I think that Albertans would hope that the government could sit down with public-sector unions and make improvements to their pensions collaboratively. One would expect that the unions have several good ideas about easy fixes that would improve the viability of the plans. Has this government agreed to all of these easy fixes?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can take the hon. member back in the history of the consultative process, that we started in July of 2012, but I'd also like to remind the hon. members, all members opposite, that on all of the plan boards, the four that we're talking about, that are the public-sector boards, there are union representatives, and there are employer representatives. We've been consulting with those boards all the way through. Those boards then did surveys with all of their membership to talk about the various different things that they could do. In fact, on the websites of those boards they talk about the challenge of sustainability given the current situation in future interest . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, here are a couple of easy fixes that the unions' leadership has put forward. The AUPE has asked the government to end cost-of-living adjustments for deferred pensions for people who have quit as employees. They say that this would save pension money and not harm any of the pensioners or employees. They've also said that the government is using the wrong rate for commuted value. The actuaries say that using the right rate would result in better planning. These are easy fixes, which the unions say will improve the situation. Why won't the government make them?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we are using expert advice on the commuted rates, and we're working with all of the plans to ensure that their unfunded liability is calculated correctly and that the future values are calculated correctly. I would also say that one of the recommendations that was brought forward by the union representation is around joint sponsorship of the plans, and in fact that is exactly where we're going.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, a reasonable government would negotiate with the unions and then bring in implementing legislation to put a deal into effect. Instead, we have the traditional PC "we know best; keep your advice to yourself" approach. This government offended our front-line workers with bills 45 and 46, and now they're upsetting hundreds of thousands of employees and pensioners by unilaterally messing with their retirement plans. How has this government's approach to labour relations gotten so far off track?

2:00

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, last week, when I met with all of the union representation, we talked about moving forward with the contribution rate cap discussion and the joint sponsorship discussion. In fact, I'm looking forward to sitting down with Mr. Smith on the PSPP joint sponsorship because he'd like to get that rolling fairly quickly.

I'd like to quote something, though. It says:

The reason why there are so few defined benefit plans in the private sector [or public sector] is because they are unsustainable with no flexibility to adjust [for volatility] . . . If the issue is not addressed early enough, major corporations and even national governments face financial ruin as more and more people turn 65 and start drawing from their defined benefit [plans].

That's right out of their 2013 . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

You also have two pension bills on the Order Paper this afternoon. Presumably, there will be greater debate.

Let's move on. The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said something rather curious while defending his government's Republican-style attack on public-sector pensions. He said that there will be "fewer people paying and more people drawing" from the pension plan. Well, Alberta's population is exploding, and young people are moving here in droves. We need more public-sector workers, not fewer. It's illogical for this Premier to say: more work will be done for more people with fewer workers. It doesn't make sense unless the Premier's plan is to provide fewer government services, privatize services, and switch to robots. Premier, which is it? [interjections]

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that, in fact, one of the unions' leadership last week suggested to me that the solution for this is to simply make the government workforce bigger – make it lots bigger – so you've got more contributors, and that will solve the problem. It's kind of like the Liberal logic that we're hearing right now. The truth of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that in the public-sector plan in 1993 there were 40,000 contributors to the plan. In 2013, 20 years later, there were 40,000 contributors to the plan. That is a testament to the great work that our public sector does. They're doing a lot more for less. But we've had a doubling or tripling of the number of retirees. The math, as the Auditor General says . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, that's a long way of saying: fewer government services, more privatized services, and robots.

Mr. Speaker, this government is changing the rules of the game for 300,000 public-sector workers, who have already stepped up and forgone wage increases to fix the damage done by the Wall Street cowboys to their pension plans. The Premier said that he's switching from a defined cost-of-living adjustment to a targeted one dependent on return on investment. That means that when times are bad, the plans may not pay out enough. Doesn't the Premier understand that it's exactly when times are tough that the pensioners need these wage guarantees?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think the only robotics that are happening are on the other side, because we get the same question over and over and over again. The answer would be that when times are tough, the cost of living is probably lower, and therefore the return on the investment will probably pay the cost-of-living adjustment. The reality is that you can't pay more than you have, and you can't put a pension plan in peril by paying more benefits than are being contributed for. The cost of living is the one key factor in that piece. Everything else in the pension promise is

being held constant, and that is a very important piece about viability.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the only robotic attack is a constant attack on front-line workers: Bill 45, Bill 46, cutting staff, flatlining their wages, and now their pensions.

The last election was two years ago and at no point during the campaign leading up to election day did the former Premier talk about launching a Republican-style attack on public-sector pensions. The people of Alberta sure the heck didn't give this government a mandate for such an attack. This Premier wasn't elected as a Premier by Albertans. Premier, if you think this is really what the people of Alberta want, why don't you put it aside, call an election, and run on it? [interjections]

Mr. Hancock: Not only is he robotic, Mr. Speaker, but he doesn't understand the parliamentary process. The people of Alberta don't elect a Premier. The people of Alberta elect MLAs, and MLAs form a government. The people of Alberta have entrusted the Progressive Conservative MLAs to form this government. [interjections]

I also know that the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, want this government to do what's right each and every day, not just what was talked about two years ago or 10 years ago or, like those guys in that party would want, 15 or 30 years ago. [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. We've all had our little bit of fun. Let's just settle down and move on.

The hon. leader of the New Democrats.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Lord knows, we wouldn't want to talk about what you promised in the election, Mr. Premier.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Mr. Mason: Yesterday the jobs minister told the House that his policy of political interference was approved in advance by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, but the memo he released from the commissioner tells a very different story, Mr. Speaker, warning of the risks of ministers and their political staff influencing or interfering with FOIP requests. The commissioner clearly did not approve the policy. My question is to the minister. Why did you tell us that the commissioner had approved your policy in advance when, clearly, she had not?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's set the record straight. Obviously, when a member rises in question period or the media approaches us in a scrum or, frankly, when the public calls on an issue that they know about as a result of a FOIP, they fully expect that a cabinet minister that is in charge of a ministry has a full understanding of what information is being released from his or her ministry. Cabinet ministers are the storekeepers of their ministry. They ought to know what's being released. In order to do that, it is important that a cabinet minister be advised by his department of what is going out and what information is being released.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister's memo to the Premier and cabinet, informing them of this policy, which he claims that the commissioner had approved, was dated November 29, 2013. The commissioner's letter to the

minister, in which she warns of the risks of the policy, was dated a week later, December 6, 2013. I want to ask the Premier what he thinks about his minister telling the House that the commissioner had approved this policy when, clearly, she had not. She had warned a week later that it was wrong.

Mr. Lukaszuk: So, Mr. Speaker, what I have done, as the commissioner writes in her letter, further to our telephone conversation of November 27, 2013, is that I have called her, and I said: would it be inappropriate if our ministries were to tell us, the ministers, what it is that they will be releasing, starting Monday to Friday next week, so that we know in advance what it is that we will be dealing with with the public, with constituents, with media, and with the opposition? She said that in principle she has no issue with ministers being advised as long as there is no interference, and there wasn't any.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's interesting because the commissioner's concerns have been validated. A memo dated December 13, 2012, shows that a FOIP request to the Minister of Health was vetted by his partisan press secretary two months before it was released. Not only that, but it was clear that the source of the FOIP request was partly revealed to the minister. I want to ask the Premier. Mr. Premier, will you please stop the baffleleg and admit that your government is interfering with the freedom of information process?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the public of Alberta wants to know and can be assured that the FOIP process works appropriately for them without political interference. They also want to know and can be assured that ministers of the Crown will know and understand the information that's being released from their department in order that they can discuss it appropriately in the public context. Those are all appropriate pieces, and that's an appropriate way for it to happen. The ministers of the Crown do not interfere with FOIP co-ordinators' release of information, but they should be informed about the information which is being released.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Please curtail your preambles from this point on.

Let's go to Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Health Care System Information Reporting

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we released approximately 70 pages of detailed health information. It's the Edmonton zone performance dashboard, and it includes key measurements on ER wait times, continuing care, surgeries, children, mental health, and radiation therapy, among others. It's incredibly important information, but none of that is readily available to the public. We went through a costly FOIP process, taking months, just so AHS could release data about the state of public health to the public. To the Minister of Health: why do you refuse to proactively and publicly report this important information about our health care system?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps what the hon. member should explain is why she would want to spend good money to buy outdated information from Alberta Health Services, that doesn't tell the story today about the tremendous performance of our health care system. This hon. member knows that AHS

publishes a performance report, available on their website, which compares the performance of our health system to other provinces and territories using nationally recognized benchmarks. This reflects the everyday experience of citizens in their health care system. It provides them with accurate comparisons. It's the right way to proceed, and it's what we're doing.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just say this to the minister if I may. We'd have more up-to-date information if he had let the FOIP go through and gave it to us immediately.

Given that less than a year ago Alberta Health Services did report comprehensive system performances by zone on a regular basis, why are you now leaving it up to the opposition to dig and publish this information? Minister, it's about accountability.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's about ethics and ethical behaviour. [interjections] If I just heard this hon. member correctly, she suggested to this House that I interfered with the release of information that she had requested under the FOIP Act. I certainly hope that's not the case.

What I will say is that we have developed a performance measurement system that reflects all of the nationally accepted indicators reported by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It will be broken down by zone, Mr. Speaker, in the next iteration. It's a good snapshot of the very good performance that our health system is delivering and the workers that support it.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Minister, maybe you'd like to answer this. This is from a CBC document. The memo shows that Mr. Johnson and the minister had direct access to the AHS records two months before they were to be released. Under the FOIP Act documents are to be released within 30 days, which means an extension appears to have been taken by Alberta Health Services to facilitate Mr. Johnson's vetting of the records. Maybe you'd like to respond to that. [interjections]

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member doesn't seem to know when to stop. I haven't seen the e-mail that she's referred to, but if she is accusing me in this House of interfering with the release of information under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, then she should say so. [interjections] Otherwise, she should educate herself on the provisions of that act and the responsibilities of ministers to ensure their departments comply with that legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a little less noise would be much appreciated, please.

Let's move on to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by Airdrie.

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, on Friday Albertans received the unwelcome news that the U.S. government has decided there will be yet another delay in the review of the Keystone XL pipeline. This despite the fact that the project was nearing its end at the U.S. State Department's . . . [interjections] Are you going to listen, or are you going to talk?

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's remember that someone has the floor. They've been recognized by the Speaker. Let them ask their question. It's not any easier for one side to listen to a question or to an answer than the other, but show some respect for their right to ask it or answer it.

Hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, I couldn't hear what you were saying, so would you start over?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, on Friday Albertans received the unwelcome news that the U.S. government has decided there will be yet another delay in the review of the Keystone XL pipeline. This despite the fact that the project was nearing the end of the U.S. State Department's national interest determination review. Does the Premier see any rationale for allowing more time for the information to be provided on this project?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the decision on Friday to extend the time frame was extremely disappointing for all Albertans and for Canadians and, I would say, for many Americans because the Keystone pipeline project provides job opportunities both in Canada and the United States, economic opportunities, which are very much needed. It also is the most environmentally sustainable way of shipping oil. It's very important from a safety perspective – there are so many pieces – and it's been studied longer than any pipeline project in history, I think. So it's very untenable that it will take longer for a process to study it, but we do have to await the end of that process, and we will encourage the right decision.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. My constituents in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne are suggesting that the government has taken enough action on protecting the environment, and it's time to look at other trading partners. Does the minister believe that this government has taken the necessary actions on the responsible development of our resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the question. I think it's important to know that we were the first jurisdiction in North America to put a price on carbon. Just this week we announced 24 projects at the Zero 2014 forum as part of Alberta's global competition to reduce our carbon footprint. Attendees commented that Alberta is a leader in innovative solutions, and thanked this government for our commitment and foresight. We're also implementing the integrated resource management system. But we have to own the environmental agenda. We have to make sure that Albertans, Canadians, and people in the world know that we're doing a good job with the environment.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: what are you doing to ensure that Alberta's record as leader in responsible energy development is understood in the United States and with our other existing and potential trading partners?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to share the facts about our strong, responsible energy development with the United States. These facts have been acknowledged through the State Department, acknowledging the work with the land-use framework in the lower Athabasca region, acknowledging our climate change strategy, and the acknowledgement of the fact that the approval of KXL will not impact GHG emissions. In addition to that, I'll be in the United States next week speaking about our responsible energy development. Also, the southern part

of this leg of the pipeline is already delivering oil to the United States.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Provincial Budget Documents

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this morning's Public Accounts hearing was a real eye-opener. There was discussion regarding the new PC budget accounting methods, which, of course, have been roundly criticized for being misleading. The Auditor General said that the Finance minister's budget and updates are "not in accordance with accounting principles." He then went on to explain several needed changes to bring the budget in line with generally accepted accounting principles. Now, we know you would never ever ignore an officer of this Legislature. Minister, is the Auditor General wrong in his assessment?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has said his opinion on the budget, which is the policy document we table in this House. The financial statements, the Auditor General has actually said, do follow all of the accounting principles. In fact, our Auditor General has made no recommendations to this House on our financial statements, unlike other jurisdictions across Canada, who have many, many comments on their financial statements. The hon. member is trying to suggest that the budget, as the Auditor General has requested, should be constructed at the start of the year versus the end of the year. We're actually doing that for the Auditor General in this budget.

Mr. Anderson: Up is down; black is white. It's fantastic.

Well, given that the AG also said, "The time spent interpreting the Fiscal Management Act budget takes away from time available to understand the province's [actual] financial condition" and then went on to say how the budget is confusing to interpret, Minister, will you instruct your department to implement the AG's recommendations immediately to bring the budget and budget updates in line with generally accepted accounting principles?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want one thing to be perfectly clear. We have already talked to the Auditor General about constructing the budget the way he's requested, and we're going to be doing that in every budget as we move forward. We've done it in this one. But I also want to make one other thing very clear. The consolidated financial surplus of \$1.1 billion will not change regardless of what we do with the Auditor General because it is by the appropriate accounting principles, that the Auditor General is asking us to use. To suggest to Albertans that somewhere that \$1.1 billion is not true is not true information, and the member should be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Minister, you've lost the argument. Your party is battling for fourth place in the polls right now. You've lost.

To the Premier: given that your Finance minister has lost every shred of public credibility in his budget presentation, are you going to permit this minister to continue this budget charade, or will you instruct him to immediately accept and implement the Auditor General's recommendations to straighten out his budget and its quarterly updates, as the Wildrose has been asking for month after month after month?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this Finance minister doesn't do things just to get votes; this Finance minister does things because they're

the right things to do. The opposition opposite wants to confuse Albertans in terms of what the true financial picture is. Let me say this. The credit rating agencies, that actually look at our financial statements and understand what financial statements are all about, different than this Finance critic, believe that our financial statements are the most transparent, the most detailed, and the most accurate, I might add, of all provinces in Canada, including the federal government, who has more recommendations than we do. I think that's a good thing.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

2:20 Sherwood Park Provincial Courthouse

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current Sherwood Park courthouse is located in a strip mall and was opened in 1981 as a temporary facility. Now almost a hundred thousand people call Sherwood Park and Strathcona county home. This building is not suitable for the needs of my constituents, and I have received numerous letters from constituents who work in the justice system regarding the dismal state of this facility. To the Minister of Justice. My constituents want to know how the money earmarked for exploration of a court facility in Sherwood Park will be used.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to confirm for this member that the budget in 2014 accrued \$1 million for planning, and these funds are being used. I do expect a report in the fall. In addition to that, the budget in 2014 also accrued \$30 million. That's \$30 million for actual courthouse construction over the next couple of years. Of course, that's not enough to construct a courthouse, but it is enough to get the ball rolling.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that there is \$30 million of nonallocated capital funding earmarked for addressing the infrastructure needs of the courts in Alberta, can we expect Sherwood Park to see some of this money?

Mr. Denis: I can tell you that the planning is under way. I don't want to handcuff the particular committee, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell this member that Sherwood Park has been identified as a priority for the exact reasons that she has indicated here as well as to me outside of the House.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the judges in my community tell me that our courthouse is the worst in the province – and I will agree with them – will Sherwood Park get a courthouse that will truly meet the needs of my constituents?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, that is the particular plan. I'm happy that this member knows where the courthouse is, as I do as well. Geotechnical and environmental studies have been completed on the proposed site for the Sherwood Park courthouse, and it has been determined that this site is, in fact, suitable for courthouse development. I'm happy that we're making progress in this area and will continue to work with this member as well as the other member for Sherwood Park.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The timing of the actions stemming from the November 2013 correspondence between the former Deputy Premier and the Privacy Commissioner isn't adding up. The government memo states that a new process to track the release of FOIP requests is being initiated, but a Liberal FOIP clearly shows that the weekly FOIP status report existed in June 2013. To the Minister of Service Alberta: are these the same weekly reports for which permission was sought from the Privacy Commissioner, oh, six months later, or are they another different, similar but not the same FOIP status report?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this government is delivering unprecedented transparency. Under the leadership of this Premier we have the gold standard expense disclosure, we have the gold standard salary and severance disclosure, and we are conducting a review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That review has been under way for some time. We've been talking to Albertans about ways to improve the act, and we've consulted with media. The opposition parties have participated. We believe that we are going to have an improved act, and that work continues to be under way.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, to anyone on the other side that actually knows the FOIP Act, I'll present this question. Given that the Privacy Commissioner memo explicitly warns against any action that would delay the FOIP requests yet an Alberta Liberal FOIP shows the Deputy Minister of Executive Council ordering all the ministries to delay responding to the Liberal request for 30 days, does that not violate the spirit and the letter of the FOIP Act?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, once again the Member for Edmonton-Centre is confused. There are two parallel pieces. As I explained in the House last week, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council has the responsibility for co-ordinating FOIP releases when they cross departments, and someone FOIPed every department for all their ARs. It's very important to have a process because when you FOIP ARs, you may get cabinet documents, and they are not releasable under the FOIP Act, which she would know if she was familiar with it. The other process which the former Deputy Premier initiated with a memo didn't actually commence because there was a cabinet shuffle . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Right. So that other FOIP status report was just a figment of your official's imagination.

Okay. Back to the Premier, then. Now, since the Privacy Commissioner warns about potential interference by press secretaries, which are political animals, how is having a press secretary working out mitigating strategies for opposition members' FOIPs complying with section 40 of the act?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it is obviously the job of a press secretary to advise their minister with respect to how to handle information that's being released to the public with respect to FOIP or any other public release of information. That is, in fact, their job. In fact, we do not interfere with the release process, but we do need to know the information that's being released so that

we can have mitigating or other strategies relative to the explanation of that information to the public because the public will know that the opposition never puts their information into any context that makes any sense.

Government Policies

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, two years ago today this government came to power selling a much different vision than what they're providing now. Under this PC government we've seen broken-promise budgets and broken-promise policies that they never promised in the first place. To the Premier: why are you attacking the working people, that give so much to this province, our nurses, social workers, tradespeople, emergency response workers, firefighters, park wardens, corrections officers, physiotherapists, sheriffs, agronomists, water experts, librarians . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. First of all, I adhere to the premise that was raised by Premier Lougheed: no one comes to power. We have the responsibility to govern that's been granted to us by Albertans, and we take that responsibility and that privilege very, very seriously. Secondly, we respect the people who work on behalf of the public in this province, whether they're elected to this Legislature, whether they serve in this government, or whether they're the civil servants that provide the services that Albertans need on a daily basis. We respect them. We hope that they will respect them, because they do important work for Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government has spent two years breaking promise after promise on everything from health care wait times, advanced education, to full-day kindergarten and now they're asking Albertans to just trust them while their government meddles with their pension security future, why doesn't this Premier start reading the warning labels as we see them here, that a steady diet of broken promises leads to grave health risks for all Albertans?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, he can't even read his notes correctly because I'm sure it doesn't say on his pills: a steady diet of broken promises. I'm not sure that his question is premised on anything other than political rhetoric, and therefore I would respond this way. This government takes the job of governing very seriously. This government likes to focus on the big-picture issues, which focus on what makes Alberta the best place to live, to work, and to raise our families. This government cares about not only our children but our grandchildren and their future in this province, and we will govern in those children's and grandchildren's interests.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, that's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, because given that this government has promised to end child poverty, two years later 10 per cent of Albertan children are still waiting for the help that has never ever come. Making pensions thinner and harder to come by actually increases the poverty. To the Premier: is this government planning to keep any of these promises, or are they willing to just cut them loose 24 months later, just like they did with the last Premier?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would think that every member in this House would want to commit to reducing and ending poverty

for children in this province. This government initiated, in discussion with the public of Alberta, a social policy framework which is on track to do just that. We also initiated the discussion on Together We Raise Tomorrow so that we can do foundational work to ensure that it's not just stopgap measures, not just paying for constant continuance of poverty but actually putting in place policies and programs that will end it. Our social innovation fund, which we put in place, will help us to get the knowledge and the tools we need to do just that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, in 2008 Alberta Education changed the way that math was taught in our schools, and the results have not been good. The same thing happened in Manitoba, but the Manitoba government had the humility to realize they had erred, and they fixed it. They went back to the fundamentals. Their education minister just went on record saying that provinces like ours are utilizing methods and curriculums which have not been found to be successful. To the Education minister. Parents, teachers, math experts, and now other governments all recognize this is a flawed program. Will you do your job and address it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the province of Manitoba's results are nowhere near the results of the province of Alberta in math. The PISA results have shown that Alberta students are actually very good in the fundamentals in math; it's the problem-solving skills that they need. The Minister of Education has indicated to this hon. member time after time that no one is moving away from the fundamentals of numeracy and literacy as important foundational aspects of education in this province.

2:30

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, the number of math-illiterate kids in this province has doubled since the implementation of this program. That's a problem that you need to address.

Now, given that Manitoba took concrete action, explicitly including the four standard algorithms in the curriculum – vertical addition with a carry, vertical subtraction with a borrow, and they even have their kids memorize times tables by a certain level – will the minister change Alberta's curriculum to require the same thing? If so, give us some specifics about when you are going to do the right thing.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems in education, of course, is that everybody is an expert because they went 40 years ago, and that's obviously the case with this hon. member.

The reality is that we have not moved away from fundamentals in math or literacy in our curriculum. The reality is that teaching children is a matter of teaching pedagogy, not a matter of the curriculum. The curriculum sets the outcomes, sets some ways in which you can get to those outcomes, and it's up to the teachers to differentiate the methods of instruction which will work for each individual child. It's not up to that hon. member or anyone else to mandate how a child learns.

Mr. McAllister: The minister and those thumping their desks ought to realize that all of the math experts say that you're failing on this file.

Now, given that the Manitoba education minister also said that they are "revisiting the curriculum to make sure that it meets the needs of our students so that they have those most basic skills" and "so that kids have a better understanding of memorizing math

facts and then bringing back standard algorithms for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division," again to the minister or the Premier: do parents, teachers, math experts, and other governments have it wrong, or do you maybe have it wrong?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is redesigning its curriculum as well, and who would be doing that? It would be teachers. It would be experts in education. It would be the very people that he's talking about who are involved in designing the Alberta curriculum. And as they do it, they are designing it with some fundamental principles. Those fundamental principles are based on foundational learning in literacy and numeracy and the necessary 21st-century skills to be engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, and involved . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. Perhaps we'll hear more a little later.

Let's go on to Edmonton-McClung, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Loyalty Program Prohibition for Prescription Drugs

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta College of Pharmacists has made a decision to prohibit pharmacists from allowing patients to receive reward or loyalty points such as airline miles when purchasing prescriptions. The prohibition will take effect on May 1. Many of my constituents in Edmonton-McClung are not happy with this ban. My question is to the Minister of Health. What is the reasoning behind this decision?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the College of Pharmacists is responsible for setting the standards of practice for pharmacists in Alberta. It is one of many colleges under the Health Professions Act that have a similar responsibility. In this particular case the college has deemed it necessary to change their standards for the protection of the public. As the hon. member said, they have instituted a policy whereby loyalty programs will not be permitted with respect to the purchase of prescription drugs only.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister: given that reward and loyalty programs encourage patients to visit the same pharmacy and become familiar with their pharmacist, are there other ways to encourage patients to return to the same pharmacy after these reward programs are cancelled?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are, and they actually don't have anything to do with loyalty programs. They have to do with the range of services that pharmacists can now provide in Alberta. This includes things like renewing and modifying a prescription, developing a complex medication plan for clients with multiple chronic diseases, working as members of a multidisciplinary team in a primary care network or a family care clinic. These are the reasons why Albertans continue to choose their pharmacists in increasing numbers, maintain that professional relationship, and improve their health in doing so.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Finally, to the same minister again: given that some patients do not make a lot of money and depend on these reward programs, how can your ministry protect their interests if these benefits are taken away from them?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate that there are many Albertans who are members of the loyalty programs and that they accrue various benefits from them. All I can say is that we put the health of Albertans first, and in this case the college,

within its own purview and under its own authority, made the determination that points should not be awarded in connection with the purchase of prescription drugs. That's a health care decision. That has to do with quality and patient safety in our system. It is the college's decision to make, and I believe they stated the reasons for doing so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-East.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The four-year court battle between the PC government and the media saw the current Premier dragging his feet to avoid releasing information related to the deaths of children in care. Now we learn that the real gold standard is for the Deputy Premier to intervene in the freedom of information process and the releasing of information. Even the Privacy Commissioner expressed serious concerns regarding this interference. To the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: does the gold standard include the associate minister continuing to sit on his hands while the integrity of the FOIP process is completely eroded?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to say that under the leadership of this government we have been conducting a review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I was disappointed that there wasn't more participation from the opposition parties in that process, but we're always accepting new information. We spoke to about 600 Albertans throughout the process; we had online participation. We did speak to the media. We spoke to municipalities, school boards, and others. I think that the information is still under way. We're compiling it, and the work is still continuing. I believe that we're delivering good results with the efforts that we put in.

Mrs. Towle: Oh, once again, this minister really doesn't know his portfolio. The opposition asked to be on your all-party committee, and you refused.

Given that the Deputy Premier was writing letters to cabinet, which includes this associate minister, instructing on how to interfere in the FOIP process and given that the Deputy Premier gave direction to cabinet on how to avoid releasing information that had political or other reputational issues for the government, can the associate minister responsible for transparency stop the jibber-jabber and explain why the Deputy Premier was taking responsibility for FOIPs, which are in your ministry, and why you are not protecting the process? That's your job.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I heard a comment about my participation in the committee. That's patently untrue. I don't know what she's talking about in that comment.

What I can say about the FOIP process is that it has been effective. In the most recent statistics that I've been given, we responded to more than 4,200 FOIP requests. Ninety per cent of those requests, received by Alberta departments, agencies, boards, and commissions, were processed within 30 days; 96 per cent were completed within 60 days. The work that we've been undertaking to improve the FOIP process – as I've said, we've

been undertaking a review of that – is continuing, and we expect to have that ready shortly.

Mrs. Towle: Hear no evil; see no evil.

Given that this minister, the associate minister, was either aware of the Privacy Commissioner's serious concerns or the associate minister completely ignored them and given that the associate minister, who is a member of cabinet, did not once voice his concern and speak out and oppose this interference in the FOIP process – Minister, it is your job to know your FOIP legislation, to protect the integrity of it, and if you're not going to do that, Albertans want to know: exactly what do you do?

Mr. Lukaszuk: The third creature should speak no evil if she doesn't have a full grasp of the facts.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that there is no interference with the FOIP process. Albertans, as the minister has indicated, are receiving information in record time. A large volume of information is being requested, particularly by this opposition. However, I think this member, who should speak no evil – whatever that critter is that we always use that signage for – would expect the minister to have the answers to her questions, to know what it is that she is asking about, and to know the information that is being released through a FOIP. In order for that to happen, he needs to be briefed like any other cabinet minister. Accept it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

2:40

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Survey after survey shows that health care is the number one issue on Albertans' minds. My constituents tell me that we do have an excellent health care system, provided that they can get through the emergency department. We had issues with wait times in emergency rooms when our health care budget was \$3 billion, and we are still having the same issues and the same problems with a budget of \$18.2 billion. My question is to the hon. minister. Even with an \$18.2 billion budget wait times are still untenable. What is the minister doing about this?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, wait times are an issue across the country. As I said in answer to an earlier question, we are very proud of the work AHS has done to reduce wait times while coping with growing volumes in the health care system. In the case of emergency departments, as I said earlier, the volume of visits has gone up about 3 and a half per cent in the last year. At the same time we've seen the evolution of new models like family care clinics. There is one located in the hon. member's riding. FCCs have contributed to a 50 per cent reduction in emergency visits for those patients that are attached to them. That's progress.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Primary care networks were supposed to alleviate hospital emergency wait times, yet this doesn't seem to be the case. Is the minister still standing by the claim that PCNs are solving or will be solving the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, for patients who don't need to visit an emergency department, a primary care

network or a family care clinic is a great option. As the hon. member knows, in a number of hospitals across the province we have very high numbers of patients who are classified as CTAS category 4 or 5, who don't need emergency department care, but for lack of primary health care options they end up in the emergency department. The 41 PCNs across Alberta and the FCCs that we have launched, including in the hon. member's own constituency, are combating this problem very well.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that part of the problem is a shortage of doctors, what is the minister doing to accelerate accreditation of foreign-trained medical doctors?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. Of course, physicians are in short supply in some specialties. We see an abundance of specialists in certain areas, but we continue to try to attract more family doctors into our system. The international medical graduate process is difficult for doctors who want to come to Canada. There are national elements to the process. There are provincial elements. We continue to work with the College of Physicians & Surgeons to simplify and to ensure that foreign-trained doctors who are adequate, who are proficient to practise in Alberta have that opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for Oral Question Period has expired.

Statements by the Speaker

Second Anniversaries of Election

The Speaker: Just before we move on to other business, I want to take a moment to indicate to all of you something that became obvious a little earlier this afternoon, and that is that we have a major anniversary being celebrated today. In particular, I want to salute the 39 new members, who are here among us, that were elected to this Assembly for their very first time two years ago on this day.

I will name them quickly, and then we can applaud them and welcome them to the ranks on their special second anniversary of being elected. The members are from Banff-Cochrane, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Hawkwood, Calgary-Hays, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Shaw, Calgary-South East, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-West, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Chestermere-Rocky View, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Drumheller-Stettler, Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-South West, Fort McMurray-Conklin, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, Grande Prairie-Smoky, Highwood, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, Lacombe-Ponoka, Little Bow, Livingstone-Macleod, Medicine Hat, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, Strathmore-Brooks, and Vermilion-Lloydminster.

I think, Edmonton-Calder, you were actually elected for a second time, but we rolled you in anyway because we welcome you back.

Please, hon. members elected for their first time, would you all rise and let us applaud you and congratulate you on your accomplishment.

Thank you. On that note, I would remind you that today is also St. George's Day. Very briefly, we have a couple of Georges at least here with us. I'm not sure they're all saints, but they're here.

The most recognized symbol associated with St. George, of course, is St. George's cross, which is on the national flag of England, and St. George is the patron saint of England. Today we're celebrating that day.

Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: While I have your attention, a couple of other quick notices here. I want to indicate to you that today we had a large number of preambles, not the usual given and on you went, which is allowed and acceptable, but just straight-out preambles. What it tends to do is that it takes up valuable time because technically you're allowed 35 seconds for a question, and a supplemental, and another supplemental, and so on. Mathematically it's just impossible to get beyond the 15th or the 16th speaker if everybody takes the full 35 seconds and goes on with preambles.

We had a number of outbursts on both sides of the House today. There was some conviviality and some joviality that went on today. I sensed the mood to let the laughter go on, and I did. There was considerable heckling and stuff across the bow that took up some time as well. So please bear that in mind for tomorrow. I will be chatting with House leaders about this very soon.

Finally, if you have objections to the conduct of other members, you can always stand and raise a point of order. Opposition members, you're welcome to do that, and so, too, are government members. So know the rules and know how to use them.

Could I have unanimous consent, please, to revert briefly to introduction of visitors? I hear no objection.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let's go, Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two members of the Freehold Owners Association that have come to partake in our ceremonies today, Else Pedersen and David Spears. I would ask the House to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: We'll begin with Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shelly Tanis Dene, Marie Antoinette Carlson-Hill, Amber Alyssa Tuccaro, Shirley Ann Waquan, Roxanne Marie Isadore: this roll call is but a small number of the 93 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls to date in Alberta. Of these cases, 76 per cent of aboriginal missing women and girls disappeared from urban areas, which is higher than the national average. It's sad, Mr. Speaker.

Last year the Native Women's Association of Canada called for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women because since March 2010 the information this group has gathered is staggering, over 580 cases nationally. Thank you to the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Institute for the

Advancement of Aboriginal Women, who have worked tirelessly to not only look at every case but to bring attention to this issue.

In fact, in 2012 Premiers across this country, including our own, agreed to support this public inquiry that would investigate closed cases involving Canada's aboriginal women. I am saddened by the federal government's decision to reject the inquiry for murdered and missing aboriginal women, and today I call upon all of my colleagues in this Legislature to engage in lobbying the federal government to change its mind and for all of us to support what this government can and will do to work with these organizations.

As representatives of all Albertans it is our responsibility to take prudent action in helping organizations like NWAC and IAAW as they continue to bring attention to this issue. After all, Mr. Speaker, we do it for family. These girls and women are someone's sister, someone's daughter, someone's aunt, someone's mother, someone's wife, someone's grandma, and they do belong to a community. They, too, deserve justice.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dog Theft in Newell County

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a very troubling situation which I'm hearing about in my constituency. In the past three weeks I have heard that over 20 dogs have been stolen from family homes, yards, and farms. This has quickly become an important issue in the county of Newell area and has the possibility of affecting the rest of the province. As a dog owner myself this is very troubling. These people are not just stealing animals; they are stealing four-legged members of our families. I have spoken with the Brooks Animal Protection Society, the Animal Care Centre of Strathmore, the SPCA, and RCMP to see what information and updates they have on this file. To date they are saying that this issue is unconfirmed but that it seems to be contained within the county of Newell.

Think about it, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about one or two dogs going missing; we are talking about more than 20. I heard one story this morning where a dog was taken out of a kennel in the backyard while the people were at home. Imagine getting off the school bus as a kid only to find your prized pal, your buddy, your dog, had been stolen. We do not know for sure what is happening with these dogs when they are taken. There are more than a few unsettling, disturbing theories out there. What we do know is that these people are stealing our pets, and this must be stopped.

It is our responsibility as caring neighbours to look out for each other. I am urging everyone to be aware of strange vehicles and uncommon activities you witness. Please take action by documenting and reporting any suspicious activity to the local authorities. I ask pet owners in my constituency to remain vigilant, and I would like to urge all authorities in Alberta to look into it and work together to stop these egregious acts of theft.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, you have a bill to introduce?

Bill Pr. 1

Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Hale: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I've got to get my ducks in a row. I've got a lot going on here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014.

I know members across the aisle and on both sides of the House have had the opportunity to experience the Rosebud Theatre and take advantage of the school of the arts there. It is a gem in my constituency, and I'm very honoured to introduce this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 2

Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Bill Pr. 2 is administrative in nature and proposes changes to the college's name so that the spelling is corrected and it properly represents the people, culture, and organization.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings regarding FASD. FASD is a lifelong condition that has no cure but includes a broad range of disabilities related to the permanent brain damage caused by exposure to alcohol. FASD is one hundred per cent preventable. First, I would like to table five copies of *The Lancet* global health charter for the prevention of FASD. This is known as the Edmonton charter and was published in the prestigious journal *Lancet Global Health* in March of 2014. The Edmonton charter recognizes Alberta's leadership in addressing this important issue and summarizes the latest evidence presented to the conference, calling for urgent global action to address FASD.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a consensus statement on the legal issues of FASD. This document was the result of a major consensus conference held September 18 through 20 of last year. This steering committee was chaired by the hon. Marguerite Trussler, QC, retired justice of the Court of Queen's Bench and chairperson of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. The jury chair was the hon. Ian Binnie, CC, QC, former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I'd like to present 50 of more than 4,000 postcards that our office received asking the PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding for postsecondary education in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings for the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. First, is the George & Bell Consulting study commenting on the financial positions of the local authorities pension plan and the

public service pension plan, which essentially says that the plans are healthy and that the unfunded liability will be paid down in due course within nine years with no substantial changes to the pensions.

Another tabling I have is a final report called Canadian Pensioners' Mortality by the Canadian Institute of Actuaries. One of the government's calls for the need for pension reforms is that people are living longer, but one of the interesting things in this is that in the next generation lifespans are actually going down. So I submit that report as well for our records.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, five copies, the required amount. The first one is on the early learning and child care diploma program suspension as a result of the government's 7.3 per cent cut to Alberta's postsecondary institutions and the impact it's having.

The second one is the possible effects of the Red Deer College early learning and child care development diploma program suspension, the impacts of that, for discussion, on programs and staff and what it means to everyday Albertans.

The third one is the petition of the local students and those affected by these cuts by this government and the greater impact that will have on young Albertans who receive this kind of care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I don't have any points of order today unless I missed some. I don't think I did. No? Okay. Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 8

Appropriation Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014.

The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail in the 2014-15 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on March 6, 2014. These were since debated in Committee of Supply and the legislative policy committees over the past several weeks. During this time we examined and debated the budget and explained how government will continue to make prudent investments in core services such as health, education, human services, and infrastructure.

Budget 2014 is a good budget for this province. It delivers on the values and priorities that Albertans told me about loud and clear as I travelled the province in the fall during budget consultations. Albertans said that they wanted investment in key areas, especially after the tough budget that was Budget 2013. So we delivered \$1 billion in new money for health care, education, and supports for the vulnerable.

Albertans also talked about the need to continue building Alberta. We are the fastest growing province with the strongest economy in the country, and there are many pressing infrastructure needs right now in communities across this province. So we're continuing to build the schools, health care facilities, and roads that

Albertans require today, to the tune of more than \$19 billion over the next three years.

Albertans told us that they wanted to put more of our provincial savings to work for the long term, so we created a new savings plan that earmarks money for new endowments and funds to support Alberta innovation.

Last and certainly not least, Albertans said that they wanted the province to be fiscally responsible, to live within our means and control spending, and to hold the line on taxes, so we are.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 is the first balanced budget in six years. Even under the old presentations this would be a \$1.1 billion surplus. We've kept spending growth below population plus inflation for the second year in a row. Alberta has the strongest balance sheet in the country, and Budget 2014 will continue to keep us on top.

There's been a lot of discussion in this House on our fiscal situation and what we are or, as others claim, what we are not doing. With that, let's go over some of the common themes and misconceptions. Let's start with our capital plan and how it's being financed. Certain parties across the floor seem fixated on this issue, so let's talk about it. Two-thirds of the three-year capital plan will be financed by borrowing and using P3s; one-third will be paid by cash. Let me be clear about the ground rules for the borrowing. Unlike almost every other jurisdiction out there, Alberta does not – does not – borrow to pay for the groceries. We don't use our credit card, so to speak, to buy groceries. We don't run an operational deficit. Our borrowing is strictly to build infrastructure. Full stop.

Other rules include a legislated cap on how much we can borrow that is interest-rate and revenue sensitive. We must have a repayment plan in place that sets aside money every year to pay down our bonds as they come due, and we must protect our triple-A credit rating, which allows us to borrow at the lowest possible rates.

3:00

Across the aisle we have an opposition that claims things like: our borrowing is for risky investments. Mr. Speaker, that couldn't be further from the truth. Every dollar we borrow goes into an asset, be it the bricks and mortar of a school or hospital or the asphalt on a highway. These are tangible assets that are on our balance sheet and used by Albertans every day to improve their lives.

The opposition also takes issue with analogies that our borrowing is like a mortgage. I don't want to get into the finer points of distinction between a bond and a mortgage, but let me say this. Albertans know the difference between borrowing for a vacation and borrowing to purchase a home. The government is borrowing to build hard assets like schools, and we're paying interest on the debt and setting aside money every year to pay down the principal. That sounds a lot like a mortgage to me, Mr. Speaker.

That gets me to my next point, about claims that we don't know what the interest rates will be in the future, so we're going to get into trouble down the line. Well, they're right on one count here. I don't know what the interest rates are going to be in the long term, which is exactly why we made our borrowing cap interest-rate sensitive. If I did know what the interest rates were going to be in the future, Mr. Speaker, I probably wouldn't be standing here. I'd have had a very successful career on Wall Street and be retired, probably, by now.

What this claim does show, though, yet again is a disturbing lack of understanding on the other side from the opposition when it comes to the provincial finances. When we borrow at, say, 3 and

a half per cent today, we actually lock that rate in for the term of the entire bond. So if it's a 30-year bond, the interest rate remains the same for the 30 years. So in a sense we do know what the interest rates are for the long term, Mr. Speaker.

While we're on the subject of interest payments, another point they like to make is that we could run whole departments on what we'll be paying in interest down the line. It's as if they truly believe that if we don't borrow, then there would be no impact, no trade-off. While they may get to operate in these mythical scenarios where they can have their cake and eat it too, we have to be accountable to Albertans and we have to operate in reality.

Let's take a moment and talk this myth through, too, Mr. Speaker. Let's say that we don't borrow a penny for capital. Yes, we would theoretically have money available to spend on other priorities, perhaps into savings, but the trade-off is simply this: dozens and dozens of schools and health facilities would not get built, or we wouldn't be able to rehabilitate our thousands of kilometres of highway, let alone build new ones like the Stoney Trail around Calgary. We'd have to drastically scale back the support that we give municipalities for their priority infrastructure although I assume they would continue to borrow for theirs. Albertans would feel these impacts very, very quickly. An infrastructure deficit, Mr. Speaker, is as bad as a dollar deficit.

As government we will not not build. We need to make decisions that balance the needs of Albertans today and the needs of paying for interest today. It would mean telling Albertans that they're not going to get the infrastructure that they need in a timely fashion if we were to not borrow. And what's the bigger priority here for Albertans? Albertans that I've talked to across this province said: build the infrastructure we need today because people are coming and our kids need schools.

That's the point that the opposition doesn't seem to grasp, Mr. Speaker. They have a fake budget, that operates in some mythical world, where they would save a few billion a year by simply stretching out the capital plan by a number of years. Sounds pretty easy. What they don't tell you is that that means delaying the projects that Albertans are looking for today, that we desperately need now, like a new school in Airdrie, flood mitigation in High River, completing the Calgary ring road. They should try having a conversation with Albertans about when they might build those. I can give them a hint as to how those conversations are going to go.

Now, we know what the opposition will say. They will say that it's simple, that you find the money you need by eliminating government waste. Well, that's easy for them to say, having never been in government, having never been in a position to make very difficult and important decisions. But let me remind the hon. members of this. We could eliminate the entire civil service – the entire civil service – for the sum total of \$3 billion. In exchange for the entire government of Alberta proper, we would get less than one year of the opposition's so-called 10-year debt-free capital plan. Then, of course, we would have no civil service to run the government.

Even their 2014 budget recommendations fall woefully short of explaining how they would support their own plan, how they would pay for it. Adding up these numbers, which I'll remind this House are hypothetical at best and often just plain fiction, brings us to under a billion dollars. All of the savings recommendations they have: just under a billion, which is less than one-fifth of one year of their 10-year plan. So I ask the members opposite: where does the rest of the money come from? Or the real question is: what do you cut? Which Albertans' core services do you eliminate? How do you choose which students, which seniors, which young families should have to wait for their health care

facilities, for the schools, or for the critical supports that they need today?

This is a need that we know as a government will only grow as we move forward. And we want to see this need grow, Mr. Speaker, because it reflects the economic growth and the opportunity that positions us as the ongoing economic engine of our country. This growth is good news, and we must both protect it and support it. That is our duty to the 4 million plus Albertans who live here today and the million we expect to welcome within the next decade.

Another myth being perpetuated by our critics is that Alberta has been building infrastructure debt free for the past 15 to 20 years. Mr. Speaker, this is simply not true. We began using P3s in 2005-06 because it made financial sense. The other point they neglect to explain is the different circumstances that existed decades ago. In 1976 we borrowed at over 9 per cent. The interest rate peaked at 16 per cent in 1981 and hovered around 9 per cent to 11 per cent from '86 to '92. Today we are borrowing at less than 3 and a half per cent on 30-year bonds.

While the other side seems stuck in the '90s, the reality is that Alberta has changed. The world has changed. We are growing by a hundred thousand people a year right now. Our economy is much larger. Interest rates are at historic lows. I would say that good governance, good leadership is about making the right choice in order to serve the greatest interests of our constituents. I can say with confidence that the choices we are making today, to borrow at less than 3 and a half per cent when our savings are returning 12 per cent or even higher, is about leveraging available tools to keep pace with that growth.

In the past different choices were made to meet different demands of the time. Ralph Klein's focus on debt elimination was entirely appropriate for his day. The debt he was paying off came from overspending on the operations side. We've now solved that problem. In fact, we've taken it one step further, pursuing some of the forward-thinking ideas Premier Ralph Klein entertained during his time in office, and I quote: I want to look at the whole accounting system and the way that we finance capital projects using P3s, public-private partnerships, and finding imaginative ways to finance these projects rather than the pay-as-you-go; I want to find ways to end the uncertainty of surplus years and bad years. End quote.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, any suggestion by those members across the way that what we're doing today is an insult to Premier Klein's legacy once again stands contrary to the truth. What we're doing as a government is honouring Premier Klein's, Premier Lougheed's, Premier Stelmach's, Premier Redford's service to Alberta by ensuring that we continue to build for the future of our great province; that we continue to provide the supports, services, and infrastructure Albertans need today; and that we ensure that our economy continues to thrive.

On the savings piece, Mr. Speaker, I often hear from the other side that it makes no sense – no sense – for us to save and borrow at the same time. I would ask the hon. members this. Do they not save and borrow at home? Many of us have a mortgage and a car loan while at the same time we put aside money for RRSPs or for a rainy day. If you waited until everything was paid off before you set aside money for savings, you would not have a very enjoyable retirement and you might not have the money you need to send your kids to college or to university or to help them out in their future. Where a province differs from personal finances is that the province will never retire.

It would seem that further lessons are required on the province's savings plan, the budget presentation, and our own balance sheet given that they don't seem to understand that we have no net debt

in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and our net assets are growing. Alberta is running a consolidated surplus of \$1.1 billion this year. This number is based on current public accounting standards for all Canadian governments, and the Auditor General agrees with that statement. These standards were changed in 2003, so any Finance minister or Premier since this time would end up with the same number. We have received no major reservations, as I said today in question period, from the Auditor General on our budget and have committed to show how the consolidated financial statements, that will come out at the end of the fiscal year, will link back to the budget, the constructed budget that the Auditor General is looking for, which is exactly what I said in question period today.

3:10

So at the end of the day what does Budget 2014 mean to Albertans? It means a lot of things, Mr. Speaker. It means things like 40 new RCMP officers, housing for 2,000 homeless Albertans. It means twinning highway 63 and rehabilitating 2,500 kilometres of our provincial roadways. It means support for our seniors, the handicapped, the mentally ill, and those with addictions. It means more money for new schools, new school spaces, health care, and scholarships, and it means an ongoing commitment to open new markets, ensuring our resources can get the best price possible and creating wealth and opportunity for all Albertans.

Budget 2014 delivers on these commitments and many more with a \$2.6 billion operating surplus and no tax increases. At its core, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 helps Albertans who need it most and puts the right mix of programs, services, and infrastructure investments to ensure Alberta's continued success. We're investing in communities and families. We're opening new markets. We're saving for the future, and we're living within our means. This act will provide the government with the financial resources needed to deliver on the operational savings and capital plans set out in Budget 2014. I ask all members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we've heard from the government minister. We'll go to the Wildrose, then we'll go to the Liberals, then we'll go to the ND, and then we'll alternate ping-pong style: government, opposition, government, opposition.

Let's start with Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I wasn't really going to speak to this, but there's so much that the Finance minister has said that is completely erroneous and so much that he has actually said that flies in the face of everyday Albertans.

Let's talk about what he said. He talked about living within their means. The reality of it is that they've had six straight deficits and this government has driven this province back into debt. That's not living within your means by any Albertan standards. Not at all. The reality of it is that when Premier Klein left this government, he left them with a \$17 billion sustainability fund, and today there is none of that money left over. The reality of it is that Premier Lougheed created the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and it is worth today exactly what it was worth when it was created. This government has shaved off every piece of value they could from that trust fund.

Our government, our province, and our residents could have had a sustainability fund that had grown. They could have had an Alberta heritage trust fund that is worth substantially more – some even propose that it could have been worth hundreds of billions of

dollars – and the revenue off of that fund could have actually replaced the dependency on resource revenue. That's not living within your means, Mr. Speaker. Living within your means means that you don't spend more than you make.

Nobody has a problem with you saving and borrowing at the same time. What they're saying, though, is that you've got to do it when you actually control the spending that you're seeing go out of your government. We are stewards of taxpayer money, and you have to be responsible with that taxpayer money. I understand that there are a lot of people on the other side who like to moan and groan about what the Wildrose says about this, but everyday Albertans don't want to see their dollars going to pay for executive coaching in Alberta Health Services. They don't want to see their dollars paying high severances to the likes of Mr. Allaudin Merali. They don't want to see their taxpayer dollars going to a CEO of Alberta Health Services that for every single month that she is hired, up to a year, is getting the exact same amount in severance pay. That is not responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

For this government to talk about living within your means, that's what that means. Every single Albertan knows what it's like to live within our means. Every day we make choices within our own households. We make choices regarding our children. We make choices with regard to purchases: our mortgages, our cars, our wants, and our needs. We balance that decision every single day. Some make better choices than others. But in a province as rich as ours we should be able to have balanced budgets, we should be able to have a hefty sustainability fund, and we should be able to have a heritage trust fund that has grown by leaps and bounds. The fact of the matter is that we have none of those things, none of them.

There is no question that things need to be built in this province – no question – and the Wildrose doesn't disagree with the party on the other side about that. What we also have proposed is that you could do that through the 10-year capital plan. Now, this government will tell you that we actually end up putting more money into infrastructure over 10 years than this government is putting in over the same period of time. The reality of it is that this government touts and talks about all of this building for infrastructure: 50 new schools, 70 renovations yet not a single shovel in the ground. Not a single one.

How can you sit there and tell Albertans that the reason we went into debt this year is because we're building when you haven't actually built a single thing? [interjection] You can tell me what you have, though. We know what we have. We have Alberta Health Services spending a billion dollars on waste. We have them spending \$460,000 every day in an 18-month period. What did they spend that money on? Executive coaching, snow removal, marriage counselling, yoga mats: that's what we have. We have proof of that.

Just last year we saw the Auditor General come out and talk about how Alberta Health Services spent \$100 million – \$100 million – on credit cards. What were they buying? Tickets to Flames games, actual product. The same things that they were supposed to save money on through the procurement process they actually ended up doing on credit cards, and the Auditor General spoke out against that.

What else do we see? Well, we see severance packages going to Alberta Health Services executives that far exceed what the average Albertan makes. Do you know what you could do with a hundred million dollars? Do you know what you could do for this province with the \$1 billion that was spent in 2012-2013? Do you know what that could have done to reduce the debt of this province?

When this government sits up here and talks about living within your means, why didn't you actually live within your means? Why didn't you go to Alberta Health Services and say: "This kind of behaviour will no longer be tolerated. We're going to take \$1 billion, and we're going to eliminate the pension liability for our front-line workers"? Why didn't you say to Alberta Health Services: "We care so much about how our front-line workers provide services to the needy, the vulnerable, the elderly. We respect you so much"? Why didn't you say to them: "Rather than padding our own pockets and the people who donate to our party, you know what, front-line people? We're going to get right behind you, and we're going to make sure that Budget 2014 actually protects those who provide the most needed care in this province"?

Why didn't this government live up to its campaign promises and balance the budget? Why couldn't they do that? That was a campaign promise. They like to talk all the time about what the Wildrose would do or what the Wildrose wouldn't do. The reality of it is that they went door-knocking, and they told everyday Albertans, "This is what we're going to do for you," and then the minute they got elected, they turned their tails and ran.

Why does this government continue to disrespect the very people who built this province, the very people who right now are having a hard time paying their power bills, have an incredibly hard time getting two baths a week, can't even get home-cooked meals? Are you guys actually really proud of the fact that you spent \$460,000 a day in an 18-month period on executive coaching? Is the PC government proud of Budget 2014, which in previous years allowed executive pensions that are so grossly overrated to go to people that don't even provide front-line service?

When we want to talk about Budget 2014, do you want to make real change? Do you want to actually effect change in this province? You stand up and you say: "I'm going to protect the needy. I'm going to protect the vulnerable. I'm going to side with my front-line services. I'm going to make sure that we actually do have the best health care system in the world, not just a mediocre one. I'm going to actually make sure that every single taxpayer dollar is responsibly spent, and we will end the process of abusing the taxpayer."

That's what Budget 2014 could have done, but it doesn't do that. Instead, what it does is disrespect everyday Albertans by telling them things that aren't accurate, by telling them that this is a balanced budget, by telling them that we live within our means, but we've blown through a \$17 billion sustainability fund. The reason we are back in debt today is not because of anyone else. There's been one government in this province for 43 years, and every single problem that we have today is because of one government. The government actually could have said: "Today we're going to change the way we do business, today we're going to stand up for everyday Albertans, today we're going to live within our means, and we're going to set the example."

3:20

Budget 2014 could have reversed the 50 per cent increase that the PC members on the other side, who have the controlling interest on committees, voted to give MLAs. It could have reversed that. We certainly would have supported that. Budget 2014 could have put stronger caps on sole-sourced contracts. It could have done that. It didn't do that either. Budget 2014 really could have said that we are going to reinvest in Alberta, and it chose not to do that.

Here's the added problem that Budget 2014 has, and this is the problem that the Minister of Finance has. In Budget 2013 he stood

up and said almost exactly the same speech as he gave this year. What happened two months after Budget 2013? Well, I'm pretty sure most of the people in the gallery could tell you what happened two months after Budget 2013. It looked a lot like this, Mr. Speaker. It looked like people with developmental disabilities got a \$42 million cut. That wasn't in Budget 2013. Two months after, what did this government do? They said to the most needy and the most vulnerable in this province: we're going to cut you by \$42 million.

They would have went through with that plan. The only thing that stopped them was massive protests and massive organizing and an effective all-party opposition. It was not the PC Party, it was not the PC government that stood on the steps of the Legislature saying: "We will reverse those cuts immediately. We made a mistake." It wasn't them. They were going to push through the \$42 million in cuts. [interjections] I understand that the members on that side don't like to hear this. It makes them uncomfortable. But that's a fact. Nobody made that up. The department of PDD got a \$42 million budget cut right after the budget was delivered.

Who else got a cut? A 7.3 per cent cut to postsecondaries. But that wasn't in Budget 2013 either. What happened then? Programs were cut, programs that affect every single everyday Albertan. What did they say then? They said: "In Budget 2013 we're living within our means. In Budget 2013 we're standing up for Albertans. In Budget 2013 we are protecting the needs of Albertans." Two months later they cut postsecondary, and they cut disabilities for \$42 million. Now, the Minister of Infrastructure applauds that. That's an interesting take. I'm not so sure his constituents would agree with him, but if he likes to applaud cuts to disabilities, that's his position. That's not what Albertans want. That's not living within your means.

The problem they have with Budget 2014 is that, quite frankly, they just don't trust you. How do we know that two months from now Budget 2014 doesn't talk about all the same things and then turns around and makes the exact same cuts they tried to make last year? Mr. Speaker, we can all sit here and talk about partisan lines. We can do that, and I do it all the time, and every single member in here does. [interjection] Yeah, I absolutely do. You're right, Minister of Finance. You're absolutely right. I'm a Wildrose member, and I'll stand up for Wildrose policies any time.

The difference between me and the Minister of Finance is that I campaigned on balanced budgets, and that's exactly what we'll do. It is not my job to make sure that they fulfill the promises they made in the 2012 election. My job is to hold them accountable to the promises they made in the 2012 election campaign. My job is to stand up for everyday Albertans.

I will remind the hon. members on the other side that 440,000 Albertans, actually a little more than that, didn't vote for your party. Four hundred and forty thousand Albertans. There were actually more Albertans who voted against you than with you.

I would remind all members that when you're talking about living within your means, everyday Albertans know exactly what that means. When their power bills go sky-high and their mom and dad can't get a fresh-cooked meal in their care facility and they can't get a care worker for their disabled person because there are not enough resources, everyday Albertans very clearly know and they remember that Alberta Health Services executives got big buyouts. They know you spent \$460,000 a day for 18 months. They know that you gave perks to Alberta Health Services employees the day after they were reorganized out of their positions. That's something each and every one of you will have to answer for at the doors in your constituency.

But just remember. To everybody in this room: you had a \$17 billion sustainability fund, that you blew through in seven years, in the best years this province has ever had. That is not living within your means by any standard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as I indicated, in the rotation we will now go to the Liberal opposition on Bill 8, followed by the ND opposition, and then back to government.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I did get an opportunity to speak a little bit in committee about my concerns on how the budget process had gone and about some of the different departments where I felt there could have been either money saved or where it should have been reallocated.

You know, I don't even know where to start with this. It's always the same overriding issues, Mr. Speaker. We are an immensely wealthy province, and that's a good thing and a bad thing. On the bad side it means that we don't have to be as creative as other provinces and even other states in the U.S. have been to solve some of their problems. They haven't investigated or supported sectors to get things happening that ended up working very well for them. So we have too much money to be creative. That's not to say that there's no creativity in what's going on, that there's no innovation or no research. All of that is true, but to the level that we are capable of in this province, we are not even coming close because we can just chuck money at it. We, the government, can just chuck money at it, and they do. That's how they fix lots of stuff. Now, amazingly, they tell us there's no money one day, and then, lo and behold, they've got money to chuck at something the next day because they think they might lose that seat.

On the other side of this we are spending nonrenewable resource revenue every single day, and that is the oil that came out of the oil sands or out of conventional oil and gas yesterday. We're spending it today. We're subsidizing our operating every single day by 30 per cent. For every dollar the government spends today providing programs and services, 30 per cent of that, 30 cents on that dollar, came out of the ground yesterday. We can't get it back. They're nonrenewable resources. They're not trees. It's not agriculture. We can't get it again unless a few of my hon. colleagues would like to lay down and die, and in a few hundred thousand years we would have more of it. That just went right over everybody.

Mr. Eggen: That was kind of weird, actually.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you know, we had a Premier that once said that greenhouse gases were from dinosaur farts.

But what is problematic for me about the spending of that nonrenewable resource revenue is that it's gone. We are increasingly in a situation – we can just start to see it out there on the horizon – where people either cannot or will not want to buy that oil or gas, and then what? We can't subsidize ourselves with that money anymore because it's not there. We're not likely to run out of it – we've got pretty good reserves – although eventually we will. I think we're at somewhere between a 50- and a 75-year horizon. But the likelihood that people will stop buying it from us because it has a bad reputation or we use too much water in production or any number of other reasons: that's much more likely. So then what? You're going to cut 30 per cent of the programs and services here because you don't have that revenue anymore? You shouldn't have to do that.

3:30

I have always looked and the Liberal caucus has always looked for savings plans, that that nonrenewable resource revenue would be put into a savings plan. This year when I heard that there was going to be a social investment fund – I'm sorry. Am I using the right words? Social impact bond? Social endowment fund? I mean, there's a reason why there's such confusion around that. Every time I asked about it in a budget debate, I got: well, we're working on that. I'm sorry. How do you do a budget if what you've actually defined has not been worked out yet? How do you know what the budget figure is? You can't. So that tells me that you're kind of making up figures, which is what I always thought, but it's nice to have the proof.

I was very interested in these social bonds, this social investment fund. Where's the money coming from? Oh, well, let's just take it out of the heritage savings trust fund. That's not making much of a difference. It's taking it out of one trust fund and putting it into another trust fund. That's doing nothing about spending that nonrenewable resource revenue. So no problem solved there.

Then somehow we're going to get private investors involved in public services by investing in it, but if they don't like the outcomes, then they get their money back. You know, to me there's a reason why there is a difference and a separation between public administration and public money and private corporations. Now, private corporations are there to make money for their shareholders. Okey-dokey. Fair enough. Public administration is there to provide a program and a service for the particular user groups, and any surplus they get is reinvested into providing that program or service. So they have different objectives. When you start crossing those objectives, it doesn't work.

I remember that in the arts community some years back it was decided that part of the reason the arts were struggling was not because we weren't getting enough funding but because we weren't running enough like a business. Well, we're not a business. Anyway, we were made to act like businesses, and as a result we lost almost half of our large companies in Alberta. We lost Stage Polaris, we lost the Phoenix, and a number of the other companies were in serious, serious trouble: Theatre Calgary, the Citadel, Alberta Ballet, and a couple of other ones. So this whole thing about, yeah, let's make the not-for-profits and the public administration, which is also government, folks, act more like a business does not work. I still don't understand this great social fund that's supposed to be happening. It sure isn't doing anything to save nonrenewable resource revenue.

Now, you will see that we have a number of pages that assist us in this Assembly. If I were them, I would be right ticked off at the people that sit in here because we're spending their money. They're not even going to get a choice in it. They're not even going to get a chance to say: gee whiz, don't you think you could save some of that so there might be some left when I get to a point where I could really use it? They don't even get that chance because we're spending it already. We spent it yesterday.

What do I think about this appropriation bill? Well, I don't like it. I don't like it because I think that there's a deliberate attempt on behalf of the government to deliver three sets of books. I just think that's inappropriate. Lo and behold, the Auditor General agrees with me. He thinks it's inappropriate, too. It is not done according to generally accepted accounting practices, which is the standard, even, if I may say, the gold standard of how we produce financial statements in this country and across the world. So we've now taken ourselves out of any comparison with any other jurisdiction. That may well be deliberate on the part of the government. They

don't want to be compared. I can't imagine why that would be, but there you are.

I don't like the three sets of books. I don't like the fact that there is no real savings plan in there. I don't like the fact that supposedly a budget is produced and nobody can tell me how because they haven't finalized details on things. I mean, a budget is a plan. If you don't actually know what your plan is, how are you going to be able to implement it day after day? Oh, well, that would be why they're not.

Back to where I started, which was that we have enormous wealth, which should be able to work for all of our constituents, all of our citizens in the province. It really should. I have to admit that this government has absolutely baffled me in the way they can blow so much money and have almost nothing to show for it. I mean, yesterday I was talking about them rolling up and smoking something, and I was kind of teasing them, but honestly it's literally gone up in smoke. How could we possibly be plowing more and more and more money into health care and having less and less and less access? We are doing worse on just about any target or benchmark or comparison or outcome that we've ever used. We're putting more money in and getting less of a result and less of an outcome. This is just not good. I'm being studiously ignored. It tells me that I'm probably right.

You know, we're speaking in third reading, and we're supposed to be speaking about the anticipated effect of the bill. I think the effect of this bill will be another series of stumbling and bumbling, a lack of credibility in what the government is doing, no new ways of actually dealing with problems, just pretending that you're doing something new without really doing it. The people that are really going to pay the price for this are the people that have less tools at their disposal in this province: the vulnerable, the poor, the elderly, the aboriginal, and the new immigrants that can't find a place for themselves.

That just isn't, you know, the society that I wanted to live in, and frankly it's not what the people across from me are capable of. There are a lot of good brains over there. They're just not getting a chance to work, for some reason. I just find this Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, profoundly – I mean, what are the words you can use here? Disappointing? That doesn't seem accurate enough.

Mr. Eggen: Insubstantial.

Ms Blakeman: Insubstantial, yes. It's all of those things.

There's just no good reason. I'm tired of listening to the rhetoric that we get from over there, the pretending that it's all okay. You know, the first thing on the road to recovery is admitting that you have a problem, and this government has to admit they have a problem. You do.

Thanks very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available.

Seeing none, let's move on, then, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the associate minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have some brief concluding remarks in regard to the budget bill. I have spoken at length on this Bill 8 already, but I think it's important for us to just make a quick review here of some of the main points that form the foundation of any given budget and what specifically they are in this particular budget in 2014.

Whenever we see a budget come forward, we like to look to see what the government uses as a measurement of inflation and a measurement of population growth. We can debate as to whether those numbers are accurate or not. I found them to be reasonably

so in this particular document. It's very important as a benchmark for how each of the budgets in each of the ministries comes through because, of course, if inflation and population growth are at a certain level, then it doesn't matter if you have a small increase or even a larger increase in a budget. If it doesn't meet that number, then effectively it's still a cut. So it's very important.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think the numbers for this year in terms of a combination of inflation and population growth globally for our economy here in the province of Alberta were set by the government at about 5 per cent. So this budget overall I believe was at about 3.7 per cent. If you didn't meet that 3 per cent, let's say, in each of the ministries just as a baseline, then it's as good as a cut, really, considering the growth of our economy. Everybody knows that our economy is growing here. Any suggestion about belt tightening and, you know, that we have to make hard decisions and make these cuts here and there is absolute balderdash, right? We know very well that our economy is doing very well. Thank you very much.

The Alberta New Democrats toured around to each corner of this province before the budget came out, and we found no signs of anything but substantial growth in both the economy and the population in our fair province from north to south and east to west. So if you're not meeting that 3 per cent rate for any of the ministries, then in fact you're making a cut. Really, this budget is nothing more than a hold-the-line budget if you put it right across the whole spectrum.

3:40

If you start looking at where the money is actually coming from, then it becomes even more interesting, Mr. Speaker. As I said last night, at this juncture with our economy and the way things are, I think it's a precondition of building a budget, a responsible budget, that it balances. This one sort of does, but once you go through all of the Byzantine layers of how they report this budget, which takes an expert and a team of researchers to finally sort through it, you'll see that, probably, we are balanced or around \$50,000 north or south of balancing the budget, which is quite remarkable, really, when you're thinking of a \$43 billion number. The key to that is that we received a \$1.1 billion increase in our transfer payments for health care from the federal government. If we didn't get that, indeed we would have ended up with another budget deficit here in 2014 in Alberta.

So we need to really give our heads a shake about that. Here we are with, probably, the engine of the Canadian economy, this tremendous growth in population and in our economy, and we're still not really balancing the budget without some transfer payment from Ottawa. That makes you wonder, I think. Everybody's shaking and scratching their heads to various degrees here, and I certainly am, too.

It's very important, Mr. Speaker, to look at this picture in the wider sense, not just where we spend those monies in each ministry but how we get the revenues to actually pay for that. We've talked about this before. We know very well that we have a serious revenue problem in this province. We let billions of dollars slip through our fingers that are rightfully ours as the owners of the natural resources that we have in this province and the generators of the economy which creates the basis by which people make so much money. Some people make a lot of money out of this province. If we're not capturing that money, we're not being responsible as legislators here in the province of Alberta.

I am embarrassed to watch just how much money does slip through our fingers through a very, very antiquated and primitive tax structure that we have here for both personal income tax and

corporate tax. Then, of course, there are the royalties that we fail to collect from our nonrenewable natural resources.

It's interesting. We have to look around. We should always try to learn from best practices in other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world. I was looking at Saskatchewan. I know people like to hold Saskatchewan up because it's also having a period of economic growth and prosperity. Good for them. That's all fine and good. You know, they have a much more reasonable agreed-upon tax structure that is progressive. A progressive tax structure, for people who don't know what it is: the most advanced, industrialized countries in the world use it. It's a way by which you can tax at different levels different levels of your income so that people that are earning \$50,000 or \$40,000 are not being unfairly burdened with the same tax percentage as someone who earns a million dollars or something like that.

With a progressive tax structure similar to the way Saskatchewan collects their taxes and other ways by which they collect their taxes, we could realize an extra \$3.7 billion here in the province of Alberta. That would not just balance the budget very well, thank you very much, but it could actually make the investments for which we are responsible here as the provincial Legislature a real investment in social capital to ensure that no child gets left behind, that we do have a proper K to 12 education program with not overburdened class sizes, that postsecondary education is not unaffordable for people who need and should be able to go there, and that our health care system is looking after people, especially in their senior years.

Just why one simple adjustment that we can learn from the province next to us, only a few hundred kilometres away – I don't see anybody in Saskatchewan suffering from a progressive tax structure. I think that they all think that this is a very fine thing. The net emigration from Saskatchewan to Alberta has been stemmed by their very progressive tax structure and the way by which they organize themselves. You know, we could do something very similar, a very modest proposal. It's not radical. It's something that we ran our province on for the majority of the history of this province, and then suddenly we've slipped into this sort of, as I say, very primitive and regressive tax system of the flat tax, which is to nobody's benefit except the very few people that earn over a million dollars or so.

Those are some of the things that I just wanted to make sure that we got out of the way, that we made very clear here before we finished off with our appropriations debate. Alberta New Democrats believe that we have fundamentally a very strong province. We have a very educated population, and we have a natural resource base that is the envy of many other places in the world. We've created a situation by which we are not using those nonrenewable energy resources to transition into a renewable, sustainable, equitable, and socially just society, and until we do that, we're not doing our jobs as legislators. We will certainly continue to fight, to push in that direction. There are strong forces that push in the other directions, but then, I suppose, through that tension we should really work in the spirit of compromise and look for the things that are best for the people and the majority of the people most of the time.

We look for common-sense, practical solutions. We're not walking around carrying these heavy burdens of ideology that seek to dismantle the public good. We know where we came from as New Democrats, and we know that the vast majority of Albertans actually entertain the same basic principles as we do: the spirit of co-operation, the spirit of looking after each other when we're most in need, the spirit of creating something that's sustainable and not blowing off all of your nonrenewable money

and resources all in one go, all in one generation. You know, it's a matter of time. So these budgets, moments in time once a year, are a chance for us to remind ourselves of what's most important and to remind ourselves of exactly whose money we're debating on in the first place here, right? We look for ways to be more efficient, and we look for ways to be more equitable.

Mr. Speaker, you know, someday I would sure like to vote for a budget. It would be so great, and I'm hoping, based on the very practical suggestions that we've put forward in regard to education, in regard to health care, in regard to finance, energy, and so forth, that we can find some middle ground by which we can work and move forward.

It's sort of ironic because, I mean, some of the things that I was reflecting on over the last 48 hours about this budget are places that this government sought to go to, at least in writing, on paper, when they ran the last election: this idea of full-day kindergarten, this idea of investing in postsecondary education, diversifying our economy, and so forth, right? Obviously, this government knows what is the right thing to do because they put it in black and white in their campaign documents in 2012, so it's not as though they are working from a deck of cards that's ignorance, by any chance, but they are making choices, and the last 24 months have been a bit cathartic, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, for everyone. You know, I've never seen anything quite like it, quite frankly, how things started to fall apart in terms of the government and the change in direction that they've made, but now is a chance to pull back. It's a fresh beginning. We'll have a new Premier, and I really do expect that this PC government will take a hard, existential look at just where they are right now and start to invest in the things that people really need and want in this province.

We can have lots of empty words about how we want to take care of people and so forth, but we can only judge a government by their actions, so every single individual action that this government seems to take on money, on social policy, and so forth always seems to default to looking after a very small percentage of the population and making those people more able and more well off while the rest of the population, which is more than 4 million people here now, seems to have to get by with less and less. It's perhaps the most bitter irony when you live in a place where there is obvious prosperity, such obvious prosperity, and the cost of living even at full employment is becoming more and more difficult to bear.

So, Mr. Speaker, Alberta New Democrats are here. We are providing some practical alternatives. I think people are starting to listen, and I'm very proud to be having this opportunity to speak here today.

Thank you very much.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Associate Minister of Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014. Obviously, this is the bill that sets out the amounts per department that were in the budget and puts them into law for those amounts to then be utilized by the various government departments in delivering public services to Albertans. I do want to provide a number of comments today that focus on a couple of key areas that were discussed already as part of this act by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board as well as some of the

members of the opposition that have spoken already and provide a particular context for myself and on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Klein.

The first thing that I do want to talk about is that, you know, obviously, we've heard from a couple of opposition parties that the government can never do enough, that there's never enough money for the government to deal with all the challenges that we have, and they are correct, Mr. Speaker. One of the fundamental reasons that we are here as Members of the Legislative Assembly is to allocate what is a finite amount of resources in our society to try to make our province a better place to live for those that live in it, our constituents. So there will never be enough money.

But what is really interesting is that they continue to perpetuate this plan of spending more and taxing more, whether it's raising royalties, income tax, whatever, that, frankly, has been rejected by Albertans over and over and over again for decades in this province. I can tell you that a significant majority of my constituents do not want their taxes to be raised. They do want the government to be more efficient with their taxpayers' money, and that's what we've set out to do through our results-based budgeting process and in a number of steps that we've taken in last year's budget and this year's budget. So, you know, I just can't subscribe to that line of thinking, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to make some comments around what was talked about earlier, actually, in question period by the Member for Airdrie, and I think the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake referred to it as well. It has to do with the budget deficit or surplus that we may or may not have in this province. When the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board tabled his particular budget about a month ago or a month and a half ago, he indicated, as he mentioned earlier today, that we have a consolidated \$1.1 billion budget surplus in this province for the first time in six years. That's something that I think every member of this Assembly can be very, very proud of. I know that I'm certainly proud of it. I know that a majority of the work and effort that I put in with my time as the MLA for Calgary-Klein has been focused on trying to get us back into a surplus position, and this is something that I'm very proud of.

But there have been a number of comments that this is not true. Frankly, I get the sense that a number of members without saying it have actually said that we're not telling the truth, that we're hiding something. Well, I went back and did an analysis and looked at Budget 2005, one of the last budgets tabled under former Premier Klein, who these members always hold up to the highest standards of fiscal conservatism and responsibility, and looked at how they calculated the surplus that was put out there. At that time they were projecting a \$1.5 billion surplus. The way that you calculate it – and this is according to public-sector accounting standards, the exact same standards that the hon. Member for Airdrie was talking about earlier today in question period – is by essentially taking all revenue sources and subtracting the total expenses, and that's how you get your surplus. Total expenses are essentially the sum of your program expenses and debt servicing costs, and what goes under program expenses are your base operating expenses, expenses for capital purpose, and any sort of sustainability fund transfers. That's how you calculate it.

One of things that probably not very many members know about – and I'm sure that the Member for Airdrie for his time on Treasury Board probably understands this, but I would bet dollars to doughnuts that not very many members over there, particularly the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, who wanted to stand up and suggest that the Finance minister didn't know what he was talking about, could tell, from a public-sector accounting practice,

the difference between capital investment and capital grants. Now, they all go into capital projects, and they go into our capital plan, \$6.6 billion of it. But some of it is capital investment, and some of it is capital grants.

Capital grants are grants that we provide to third-party entities like Alberta Health Services, school boards, municipalities, whatever, that end up going on to own that asset. Capital investments are stuff like provincial roads, corrections facilities, any sort of provincial bridges, any sort of assets that are then owned by the provincial government. Those actually are not counted in total program expense according to the public-sector accounting standards. It has been like that forever. That's how Ralph Klein used to calculate his budgets. Frankly, it's how every government in this country calculates whether they have a deficit or a surplus position, including the federal government. When the members over there wanted to stand up and suggest what a great job Jim Flaherty did for this country – and he did – this was the standard that he used to determine the calculation of whether the federal government was in a surplus or a deficit position.

It's funny, I got into this debate on Twitter with the gentleman that purports to represent the taxpayers in Alberta. He's a well-intentioned individual, but he threw out two different deficit numbers: the deficit is actually \$2.3 billion, or it's \$3.9 billion. I said: "What? How can there be two deficit numbers?" How can you have any sort of credibility by saying, "Well, it actually might be two different things?" I said: why don't we just decide to calculate it the way that every other government in Canada decides to calculate it, the way that the Institute of Chartered Accountants wants us to calculate it when they set out the public-sector accounting standards? By doing that, you get a surplus this year of \$1.1 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's something that I think we can all be proud of as Albertans.

The second thing that I want to talk about – and it goes to the crux of what I think is a very significant division in this Legislature – has to do with our capital plan. As I just mentioned, it's actually a \$6.6 billion capital plan. It's certainly a little bit more than we anticipated that we were going to spend last year, but we have some significant challenges. Last year when the budget was tabled, in 2013, we didn't have a deal for the southwest portion of the ring road. Last year when we tabled Budget 2013, we didn't have the 2013 floods. This is a significant difference about the approach around capital and how those capital projects should be financed, Mr. Speaker.

Under the way the opposition is proposing, they would have had to cut schools, cut roads, cut hospitals and all other capital expenditures in order to then fund the southwest Calgary ring road because their 10-year debt-free capital plan provides them with no flexibility to be able to deal with these things that come up on an ongoing basis when you're in government. In order to put in the mitigation that we're putting in in southern Alberta, that we're investing in, they would have had to cut hospitals, roads, and schools. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they would have cut, according to their plan, \$2.6 billion out of this capital plan.

If you go to pages 72 and 73 of your fiscal tables that were tabled with the budget, there's the capital plan, and it lays out all of the money. I challenged them last year, and they couldn't do it, and we were asking them to cut even less money out of the budget. Now they're saying that they're going to cut even more money out of the capital budget this year. I challenge them to do it. They make up this excuse: well, we don't have a priority list. Go to pages 72 and 73 of the fiscal tables, and do it. Put your money where your mouth is because that's what this government is doing. We are talking about building Alberta, and that's what

we're doing. A 36 per cent reduction in the capital plan does not cut it.

4:00

I want to go back to Ralph Klein. Again, I mentioned this last year. You know, I represent the constituency of Calgary-Klein. I've got a great respect for Ralph Klein and what his legacy was. One of his legacies, of course, was to get rid of the provincial debt. I agree with that. Some might think that we're not meeting those needs or not respecting that by doing what we're doing, by capital financing infrastructure projects.

One of the other things that was Ralph Klein's legacy is being an honest guy and suggesting that when we've done something wrong that we should be doing something different and changing courses. He did that very, very well. In 2006 he came out and said: yes, we didn't have a plan; what they're saying is right. I tabled the CBC article last year in the House around this time about when he said: we didn't have a plan, but we're working on it.

What would be a shame for Ralph Klein's policy would be to not heed his advice and to not have a plan to deal with the growth that we're experiencing right now in this province, which is the highest amount of growth that we've experienced in decades and decades and decades. We've increased the population in this province by 25 per cent over the last 13 years, and it's anticipated to increase by another 20 per cent over the next 10 years. That is substantial growth, and these projects cannot be put on hold. It's amazing.

The member from Medicine Hat has stood up over the last couple of months and asked questions about a hospital. I think it was in Consort or something. He stood up and asked questions about a school that has mould and leaking issues. Oh, the hospital was the one in Sherwood Park. Sorry. The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View stood up and asked questions about schools needed in west Calgary. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod stood up and asked questions about the twinning of highway 8 and highway 3. These are all issues that are pressures because of the growth that we're experiencing.

I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we're going to work very hard to make sure that those projects are going to get done. I'll tell you how they're not going to get done, though, or not get done as fast as the people that they're asking these questions on behalf of want them to be done: by cutting \$6.2 billion out of the capital plan. That's how they're not going to get done.

With that, I do want to suggest that this is a government that's trying to find balance. We found balance by balancing the budget this year. But we're trying to find balance by living within our means, making government better, making it more efficient while trying to meet the needs of today, of citizens today, because that's what our constituents want. I know that's what the constituents in Calgary-Klein want. They don't want me to turn a blind eye to the growth that we're experiencing because I'm ideologically bound to not taking on any debt to build capital projects.

Now, yes, our capital plan has grown. I, too, will have the same concerns if our debt levels, you know, continue to rise, rise, rise, and rise to the point where they're not sustainable and it puts us in a very difficult position in the future. But we're a long way away from that, Mr. Speaker. We have the appropriate mechanisms in place, as the Minister of Finance clearly articulated earlier, to make sure that that doesn't happen.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I'm open to all sorts of debate around whether we're making the right decisions or the wrong decisions. But let's be open and honest and not be blinded by ideology, not be blinded by partisanship. That fact is that we

have a lot of pressures in this province, and we as elected people on behalf of our constituents are put here to meet those pressures while balancing those needs with those of future generations.

I might get into it a little bit later when we start discussing some of the pension legislation that's before the House around the complete hypocrisy of what the Official Opposition is proposing to deal with the unfunded liability and just leaving that for future taxpayers because they're just going to cut off defined benefits and start putting new hires on a defined contribution plan. The liability, the debt, that that would leave for future taxpayers – but then they oppose any sort of debt while putting an asset in the ground. The hypocrisy is amazing, Mr. Speaker, and I think some of those members should be shaking their heads and asking themselves some very serious questions about why they're actually here in this Legislature. Is it to win the next election, or is to serve their constituents and do the right things on behalf of their constituents not just for today but for tomorrow?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I'll recognize the Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love following the passionate speeches of Calgary-Klein because, I mean, he is very passionate on numbers and stuff like that. It's good to hear. I appreciate that.

Now, the key to value for money – and I appreciate when he brings that up. He talks about the southwest ring road and whatnot. I've had the opportunity to talk to the previous MLA in my riding. He was part of those negotiations way back when. They found that they always had problems getting something signed because it was going to cost too much money at the time. They didn't feel they had good value for money. So if the current Infrastructure minister feels that he did get a good deal on that, I guess, then so be it. We'll let the public decide on that one. I think I understand where everybody has to move forward.

You talk about ideas for where to cut some money. Well, the hillbilly farmer will give you a couple of thoughts and equations here on it, and these are not my fresh ideas. Don't get me wrong. But quite a few of them are to just go back to some standard things for how to save some money on the schools. If at some time somebody plans to build 50 new schools and renovate 70 of them, let's go back to some old cookie-cutter ideas. I'm not going to be the ape of the place. It goes back so many years. You know, back in Vulcan county in the '50s and '60s all the schools there – Mossleigh, Arrowwood, Milo, Brant, Lomond, Vulcan – had the same floor plans. The bigger the school was, you made two levels of it. Those are some places we can save some honest money as far as how to build things.

When I was on the Tri-Services Building Committee in Vulcan, we had an ambulance, RCMP, and fire department built into one. The first person we got, an architect that came onboard, got 8.75 per cent for their job. So they're going to come in and try to sell us a \$10 million building because in their eyes we needed to have lots of two-way glass and rock and everything else, not to mention the fact that behind the building there are two huge concrete silos where the two local elevators are. So aesthetically pleasing? Maybe we didn't need to do that there.

Now, the problem is that you have an architect saying: well, we have to do this. And there are only two architects that the RCMP will hire when they do new buildings because of security, so they come across with that. They almost kind of push you into that corner of: what are you going to do if you don't take us? It's

pretty simple. You fire them, which we did. We said: “Okay. That’s fine. We’re going to make this project into two, then. We’ll do the ambulance and RCMP, which is our side.” When we did that and we got that across, we put up an extra concrete wall. We built our side. Then we let the RCMP go back to hiring their architect and doing their part on their half of the building. It saved over half the money by doing it that way.

Those are little things. This goes back to when you don’t lose source stuff and you sit there and make people be accountable for the money they use. I’m not saying that we can’t move forward with some of these ideas. I get that we can’t change the past and that.

You know, we talk about our assets, which the Finance minister talked about before. I’ve run a farm. When I do my assets sheet, it’s what you can sell, what’s liquid, stuff like that. Then you look at your whole farm, what your farmland is worth, what your home is worth, what your farm machinery is worth if you were to have an auction sale, and go from there.

The problem in this province is that you can’t sell the roads, the bridges, the schools, the hospitals. When we’re looking at things to sell and do that, it’s going to be a challenge that way, to make that come across.

One of the big things I hear from my constituents is about severance packages. I mean, we have a gallery full of people here that are looking at their pensions and stuff. I’ll guarantee you that not one of them up there would argue the point that if they were told that they would get one month’s wages for every month they worked, they’d be tickled pink. Nobody else in the real world gets that unless you’re a communications staff member or the past Premier, stuff like that. That’s what the problem is. We start signing people up for things that are unobtainable. If you wouldn’t do that with your own money, you should never do that with public money. It’s that simple. There are rules that obviously got danced around a little bit there to make those happen.

When I was on county council, when I was a reeve, if somebody got let go or somebody was retiring, mostly let go, they got one month’s wage for every year they worked up to 18 months. So you got a year and a half’s wages. That’s a pretty standard thing. But when you start getting one month’s wage for every month worked, it’s unheard of. Nobody does that. That’s the problem. These are the things that people get outraged about. So moving forward, I sure hope you guys can get that wrangled that back in. Those are issues, I guess, where people feel that maybe the value for money isn’t there. That’s where they have concerns on this budget that’s going through. Are we truly getting value for the money?

4:10

The Minister of Transportation and I have talked lots, and you’ve raised it, Calgary-Klein, you know, about what we ask for on this side. Well, we’re here to represent our constituents. I think we all do that. I think there are 87 people here that went out and got elected, worked hard. I never argue that we didn’t all go out and work hard to get elected here, and you’re here to represent your constituents. My constituents have asked for some intersections. They’re asking about school upgrades and everything else. So of course I’m going to advocate for them. But I find it slightly ironic that you sit there and throw it back at us that we ask about these things. That’s our job. I think we all know that. And it’s politics, and it’s a part of being in the House, and I get the theatrics side of it.

You know, talking with the Minister of Transportation, I mean, Coalhurst intersection is a key one where I’ve raised the issue here. I’ve had the questions. He’s been great to answer them. If we want to get back to saving money and what we’d do differently,

do a value for dollar when you’re doing projects. They’re going to be doing an overlay on that highway there coming up this summer. Transportation has let us know that’s going to happen. I get that we’re working, that we’re paving and making the province better. One of the things when we’re doing that is to maybe do the extra lane that needs to go into this community while they’re doing that because it saves money. It doesn’t have the start-up costs like if I were to bring in a whole crew to do that. You already have the paving crew coming in. It’s stuff like that if you want to save some money.

Go back to some of the key people around those tables. They know how to make things happen. They know where to save money if you give them the opportunity. Go back and talk to the people that are making it work.

The Nobleford intersection. We don’t have the \$40 million – I talked to the previous Transportation minister about it – to do an overpass there. It’s understandable. Then let’s live within our means. If you talk with the people there, they’re keen on: what can we come up with that’s different for that? When you sit and talk with people from around our constituency, they’re fine with that. They understand that the money isn’t maybe there for that. But what can we do to live within our means and get good value for our dollar? You know, those are the kinds of things, I think, if you’re looking for ideas on where to save some money, to sit there and just make some basic, simple cuts. Basic things for how to get the best value for your dollar.

Is it going to work in every scenario? No. Obviously not, and I get that. I’m a realist that way. But I think those are the kinds of things that we need to always keep our eyes on and say: I think that’s what we need to do. Those are the challenges, I guess, that we have.

Other colleagues have raised what was brought up in previous budgets and what happened and the flood. Yeah. I mean, that’s going to be a challenge. Nobody saw that coming. Remember, also, that we should get a large amount of money back from the federal government on that. But as a taxpayer, you know, I guess I’m paying for it either way, whether it goes through federal taxes or provincial.

We talk about how fast this province is growing. One of the things that’s great when people come here, the 100,000 a year that are moving to this province, is that they also do pay taxes here. So they’re paying into the system. Is it going to cumulatively come up that fast? Probably not, but at least they’re paying taxes. We always have to make sure we know that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down and let my other colleagues go. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I’ll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to be able to rise again to speak on the issue of this budget and why it is that our caucus will not be supporting this budget. I was just looking online here – the joys of having computers in the Assembly these days, and thank you to the Speaker for that – and I note the report on the Public Accounts Committee that occurred today, where the Auditor General was asked about the accounting processes used with respect to this budget and what he thought of them. In fact, the article says that Alberta’s Auditor General told an all-party Legislature committee and senior Finance officials on Wednesday that the provincial budget fails to meet general accounting standards. I’m pretty sure that this is something that

people have been telling this government for a long time. The quote, in fact, is as follows:

From my experience and just observing from the sidelines, a lot of time is spent interpreting these different formats . . . time [that] could be . . . spent on actually debating the essence of the budget itself.

Now, there's an interesting thought.

Then, finally, one of the Finance officials, you know, the public servants who are compelled to follow the direction of this government, stated:

The budget is a policy choice of government.

This is the ADM in Finance.

A government of the day could choose to move to a budget that's based on a financial statement basis at some point in the future. That has not been the choice of government.

Then Saher went on to say: I just think there's a better way of presenting information to the public.

Then this raises an interesting question. Why does the government present and report the budget the way they are now? I think the fact of the matter is that they really don't want Albertans to see the state of our finances in a clear fashion. Now, just to be very clear. I'm no Wildroser. I am not going to come riding in on my . . .

Ms Blakeman: Palomino.

Ms Notley: Palomino – thank you, Member for Edmonton-Centre – to demand that we slash and burn services and eliminate this debt tomorrow. But I do think that we cannot deal with the problem if we don't begin by looking at the numbers honestly and identifying the extent of the problem clearly and openly for all Albertans. Now, I appreciate that this government is not terribly interested in having that kind of conversation with Albertans because – you know what? – they've been in charge for 43 years, and the fact of the matter is that they are completely and entirely responsible for the extent of the problem.

The problem is not only a shortcoming in a number of areas that I'm going to talk about in a bit, but the problem is also a profound shortcoming in terms of our infrastructure debt. Now, this is something that our caucus has been talking about for decades – decades, Mr. Speaker – and now it is getting to the point where even this government cannot hide the degree to which they've allowed this province to decay at the expense of giving fabulous tax breaks to their very, very wealthy friends and/or royalty breaks to their very, very wealthy friends. Then they have a problem because we do have our gargantuan debt, and we have to deal with it.

I agree completely with the Wildrose that P3s are, in fact, just another way of hiding debt. You know, we've always been opposed to P3s because they're bad for the public service. They're bad deals. They undermine the employees who are typically involved with those P3s, they undermine the community within which those P3s operate, and on top of that, they're just a mechanism of hiding debt. We've always said that right from the beginning. We actually said it long before those folks were saying it. We've got even more debt hidden by this government as they pursue P3 construction. Here we have a government that uses a number of different tactics to hide their debt.

Well, why do we have debt? Well, we have debt because we have a revenue problem. Our revenue problem can be traced to two fundamental sources. One, we have a flat tax in this province, a strategy that has been adopted by no other province in the country – why? – because it's a really stupid strategy. We also have one of the most forgiving royalty regimes, forgiving, that is, if you are a shareholder for, you know, Suncor or Esso or CNRL

or whoever it is that is currently enjoying the benefits of one of the most forgiving royalty regimes in the developed world. I believe Angola charges less than we do. I'm not sure, but I think that's about where I'd have to stop in terms of describing who has lower royalties than this province.

Ms Blakeman: In a rush to the bottom.

Ms Notley: Oh, we're not rushing to the bottom. We're drowning in the bottom. We've rushed to the bottom, we've fallen into the puddle, and we can't even get out of it. We're at the bottom.

Ms Blakeman: Doing the backstroke.

Ms Notley: Doing the backstroke and coming up with creative ways to hide the financial mess that we have allowed ourselves to sink into.

You know, I've talked about the infrastructure deficit, and there are, of course, so many ways in which we see this hurt Albertans every day in our communities. I mean, we've talked about the travesty at the Misericordia hospital on the west side of Edmonton, we've talked about the horrific conditions at the General hospital, we've talked about the imminent catastrophic failure which exists at the U of A, and of course we're now hearing about the gutting of mature communities through our education system as this government pushes school boards to find the cheapest way possible to deal with the fact that they failed to maintain schools over the course of the last 25 years. We have a lot of consequences to this decision to ignore infrastructure, and they, of course, affect regular Albertans, not the high-flying ones who take employer-sponsored plane trips to the JPL on any given weekend. So that's a problem.

4:20

Now, the other thing, of course, is that this budget contains no vision, Mr. Speaker. It contains no vision for how we can actually take these resources, which we are the owners of, and convert them into a vehicle to actually grow our province, strengthen our communities, and expand upon the opportunities of each and every Albertan, who are themselves the owners of the resources about which I'm speaking. We continue to ignore these opportunities.

What are some of the ideas that we should be looking at? Well, the Member for Edmonton-Calder suggested that, based on what the government ran on in the last provincial election, some of their platform ideas – I think he suggested that they know it's the right thing to do some of these things, yet they still backed off on it. I would suggest, with the greatest of respect to my very positive and friendly colleague, that I have a bit more of a cynical view of this thing.

I think that what actually happened over there was that these folks knew that those policy platforms were what Albertans wanted, but it is not what they believed was the right thing to do. They never wanted to do it. They just knew it was what Albertans wanted to hear because it's what Albertans wanted. They knew that that was the way to get themselves re-elected. In their minds, the right thing to do continues to be what is in the best interests of a very small, select, entitled group of special interests in this province, a group which is getting smaller and smaller and wealthier and wealthier every day. Sooner or later they're not going to be able to buy enough votes for these folks. That's, I think, the direction and the trajectory that this very old and tired government is on, and I think that is reflected in this budget.

That having been said, though, I want to talk about those promises that were broken and a couple of things that I think ought to also be included and considered in the kind of positive,

proactive budget that would actually be an investment in the future of Albertans' opportunities.

We talked about full-day kindergarten. Many people have talked about full-day kindergarten. Indeed, the former Premier talked about full-day kindergarten, and I think it was around December 24 – maybe it was December 28, this Christmas – when there was a tiny, little press release that went out from the Premier's office saying: Oh, yeah; by the way, we don't think this is going to happen. I don't know how many people noticed that. I remember chuckling quite a bit when I saw that press release come out because I thought that, gee, that looks like a FOIP management strategy: let's dump that one in between Christmas and New Year's, where we acknowledge that that particular promise is not going to be met.

What else did they promise to Albertans and not follow through on? Well, we've talked about it a lot in the last few days, the commitment to end child poverty in five years and eliminate poverty for all Albertans in 10. Not only have we done absolutely nothing on that project; we have actually taken a number of steps backwards in a number of different settings.

For me, personally, I just find that to be one of the most cynical moves that a government can make, to actually make child poverty and the future hopes of children who are at risk an election issue that you will run on when you know you're not going to do anything about it. We're all politicians, and I think we probably all have a higher tolerance level for cynicism than the average voter, unfortunately. It comes with the job. But that one went well beyond mine. I've seen cynical, manipulative politics, but that went beyond what I think should be acceptable for anybody on either side of this House who wants to feel good about the job that they do when they go to work every morning.

What else did we not get? Well, we were told that we were going to get funds to actually promote and expand access to our postsecondary institutions for Alberta students, rural students, aboriginal students, those people who find it the most difficult to get into postsecondary education. What have we done? Well, we didn't follow through on the promised funds, and indeed we made additional cuts which are going to ensure that the number of spaces are reduced and that access to our postsecondary institutions will be limited even more than they were when this promise was first made. So not only did we not go forward; we went backwards.

What are some of the other things that I would have liked to have seen? Well, I'm just going to talk really briefly about two. I've talked about them before, but I just can never say it enough. Child care is one of those public policy issues that is so clearly proven to bring about profound improvements in the quality of life on a broadly equitable basis in a way that you can see decades and decades later. It's like medicare in terms of its public policy value and its merits to the best interests of the greatest number of citizens in our province. The research is out there. You can look at any jurisdiction on the other side of the ocean there and see what that does for health outcomes, education outcomes, employment outcomes. All those things go up when you have a fully accessible, affordable, quality child care system, and that is something that we continue to ignore in this province.

It's particularly frustrating because we attract people to come here to jump on our little – what are those wheels called? – treadmill, you know, and run as fast as you can to generate activity in our economy. We invite everyone to come here and work more hours in a day, in a week, in a year than they do in any other province, but we are absolutely opposed to providing the kind of child care that would ensure that people who are contributing to the economy like that will also have the ability to

have a balanced family life in a way that builds and grows our communities above and beyond simply how much money someone is putting in their pocket at the end of a given shift.

We're not doing that, and we happen to have the youngest population in the country, I believe, and probably the greatest demand, and we have the greatest number of resources at our disposal if we would just use them that way, but we just have no vision. You know, the leadership on this issue is stuck back in 1952, and it's all about: well, you know, mom can stay home, and dad can go to work. I don't know who lives that life anymore, almost nobody, certainly not the public-sector employees that this government is so fond of attacking. We could do so much if we did that, but we're not, and it's a lost opportunity.

The only other thing that I'm going to talk about briefly, Mr. Speaker, is the whole issue of how we support those Albertans who are particularly vulnerable, those Albertans with special needs, with developmental disabilities. We know that last year we saw this government take a very punishing approach to that particular community in a really callous way that surprised, you know, onlookers from all sides of the political spectrum. We were quite surprised that anyone would pick that particular fight with that particular group of people, but they did, and they restored some of the funding but not all of it.

The problem with that, Mr. Speaker, is that these folks have so many opportunities before them, but they really need to be supported for that to work, and in the course of justifying these cuts, the minister at the time suggested: "Well, here's the problem. There's a whole schvack of other vulnerable Albertans who don't qualify for support because of our criteria right now. We need to change the criteria so that we can deal with more people." Well, they changed the criteria. They reduced the number of people that were receiving services, but they haven't invited anybody else in, and the number of people receiving services has not gone up. It's gone down. In fact, that was an incredibly disingenuous approach to things, and I think that we have the option to do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was quite fascinated with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's proposal on what she would like to see in the budget and what the Alberta NDP would propose. I'd very much like for her to finish her thought and to hear the rest of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you so much. I'm glad someone was listening. That was great. He's great to work with. He's a really great guy.

4:30

Anyway, what I was going to say about supporting people with special needs is that it goes beyond simply PDD. It also goes into the area of mental health and mental health services. It goes into the area of long-term care. It goes into home care. It goes into the kind of services that you provide to people who need support. Rather than picking away at it and cutting it, whether it's the Health minister arbitrarily restructuring home care in Edmonton in a way that created vast chaos and disruption in the families and the lives of many vulnerable Edmontonians, not just seniors but also people with lifelong disability, or whether it's closing Michener Centre, you know, breaking a promise that had been

made to families for decades that this would not happen and taking our most fragile, vulnerable citizens and forcing them to change the home that they've had for 25 or 30 years at the very end of their life – incredibly short sighted and also cruel, Mr. Speaker.

It's about ensuring that our kids who are both in care or are not in care but are at risk can get access to the supports they need in our schools to not only deal with whatever special needs they have but also to ensure that they have access to the kind of education that will allow them to meet their full potential. Mr. Speaker, you can have a child who gets that help in their early years in the school setting and you can have a child who does not get that help in their early years in the school setting. The difference in that child's life will be profound 15 years later. It's not just a difference in that child's life, although for me that's all I really need to talk about; it's also a difference in the draw on taxpayer resources in the justice system, in our health care system, and all the other things that become more expensive as we allow poverty and inequality to grow unchecked.

Those are the kinds of things that we could do better, Mr. Speaker, but none of those issues are addressed in this budget. Instead, it's a hold-the-line or below-inflation budget. We know that the population is growing dramatically every year. We know the demands are increasing. We know that that's what's going on, but we are not meeting those demands because it is so important to these guys to continue their practice of giving preferred taxation benefits to their pals who earn a million dollars a year or more and to their pals who run very, very large oil and gas corporations, that aren't paying their fair share of royalty revenues. That's what these guys are interested in, and unfortunately it's regular working Albertans, regular families, vulnerable Albertans who pay the price. It's short sighted, and in the long run it's more costly.

So 43 years later we have a budget like the one we are dealing with today. Those are the kinds of decisions, not an exhaustive list but some of the decisions, that have resulted in a budget that is like the one that we have before us today, that myself and my colleagues in the NDP caucus absolutely cannot support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my hon. colleagues for hearing me today. It's a pleasure to stand up and speak to the budget bill, Bill 8, on behalf of my constituents in Calgary-Shaw and our team here in the Official Opposition. You know, I always find it interesting listening to the Minister of Finance talk about his budget. I understand that it's easy to be passionate about it. I appreciate the passion that the Member for Calgary-Klein often brings into this House. I would caution him not to generate more indignation than he can conveniently contain at times, but I do appreciate the way in which he delivers his words in this House, Mr. Speaker.

I will talk about a couple of good things about this budget. First off, it's got the governing party focusing a lot on us. I think that between the Minister of Finance and the associate minister the majority of their comments were about the Official Opposition, so I thank them for paying so much attention to what it is that we're doing here.

I will say that it is refreshing to see a focus on savings in the budget, though. Irrespective of the argument about saving and taking out debt for savings, what we like to see is money being put into that heritage savings trust fund. We recognize that there is a

place in time where Alberta will either have its reliance on the oil and gas sector – the world will have moved on, and we're going to have to find another revenue source to replace the \$8 billion, \$9 billion, \$10 billion per year that we get in resource revenues, that goes into the general revenue fund. We believe that the best way to do that is to build up the heritage savings trust fund and to use the interest off that fund to replace that revenue source. So it is a positive sign to see that the government is refocusing some of its attention on savings. It is unfortunate that they are doing it in a way that is also forcing us to incur debt, and I'll get back to that a little bit later.

Talking about keeping promises and, you know, that this is a government that stands by what it says and says what it's going to do just doesn't hold weight. Unfortunately, this government has lost complete credibility with the Alberta public around some of the things that it has promised and committed to Albertans. The building of the 50/70 schools. Two years ago today, as we talked about earlier, this government was elected. The democratic process in this province worked. They promised the world to do it. The 50/70 program. We'll talk about the number that was committed in this budget: \$1.2 billion for that. The reality is that there's no possible way that they can complete 50 new schools for which not a single shovel is in the ground right now. There are a lot of signs that have been put up around the province talking about it but not a single shovel in the ground, and we are also looking at the 70 renovations or modernizations. It's \$1.2 billion. It's not going to fly. Their original promise in the 2012 campaign was to have those schools open by the next election, so it is quite simply just a broken promise and one of many.

You know, we talk about P3s and the benefit of P3s, but let's be honest. The majority of people out there believe that P3s can be a useful tool, but this government is using them in order to hide debt. If there are scenarios where P3s do make sense, I think that at times we may be supportive of that. For example, the 19 schools that can only attract one bidder for a P3 deal: I just don't think that that is enough of a competitive process to convince Albertans that it's working.

We talk about municipal funding. There were promises made that this government was going to start funding the MSI program at a rate of \$1.4 billion by next year. Well, it's nowhere close to that. They also talk about how there are a hundred thousand people moving to Alberta every single year. Well, as my colleague from Little Bow alluded to earlier, those hundred thousand people that move here, Mr. Speaker, bring with them tax revenue, to the tune of \$872 million last year. That's a pretty sizable chunk of change. Unfortunately, the municipalities in this province that are responsible for building around the growth of this province aren't receiving the funding from the province to do it. The additional tax revenue flows in, again, to the general revenue fund of the government, but it doesn't flow through.

We talk about the minister not making decisions to buy votes. I think he mentioned that today in question period, and that was one of those laugh out loud moments for me. I'm sure every Albertan who's driven around this province over the last number of months and has seen a nice Building Alberta sign with the former Premier's name on it is assuming that they did that not as a way of buying votes but just simply as a way of advertising the infrastructure that they were planning to build because that's what Albertans needed to know. You know, the unfortunate part of putting someone's name on those signs is that when they're no longer in that office, it makes it a little awkward. So now we're spending more money on what was a vanity exercise for the former Premier to take all those signs down because it's a little bit embarrassing to see that PC orange and blue all over the province.

We talk about some of the areas where we can save money, and just in this past couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, we've talked about \$1 billion that AHS has spent on sole-source contracts, no competitive bid whatsoever. That is not the best way to be a steward of taxpayer dollars. Two hundred and fifty million dollars on outside consultants. You have one of the largest organizations in the province in AHS, and they're spending a quarter billion dollars looking outside of their own organization for consulting and executive coaching, all of these other things. The reality is that it adds up. It just adds up. Just like a \$45,000 flight, it all adds up.

Let's get back to the crux of the conversation because we do have some disagreements fundamentally on the idea of debt, and there was a point in time when this government shared some of those problems with debt. You know, I'll give you a couple of quotes from the former Premier from when she ran in the last election. She said: "It's entirely possible for us to continue to provide the quality of life that we as Albertans have without going into debt." Agreed. "Debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments." Agreed. "Debt has proven the death of countless dreams." Can't argue that one. And finally, "Alberta does not have debt, and we will not incur debt."

4:40

So when this government stands up and the Minister of Finance says that when they say something and they make a promise and they make a commitment and they live within their means yet they stand up and defend going into debt to the tune of \$21 billion, it just doesn't add up. They often ask us what schools we wouldn't build, what roads we wouldn't pave. Well, I think that they owe it to Albertans to start talking about that in a little bit of the longer term sense because come 2016, we're going to be spending \$820 million a year on debt-financing and debt-servicing costs. You think of some of the turmoil that was created over last year's budget when they cut \$42 million out of the PDD program. How are they going to find \$820 million? They talk about the \$140 million that was taken out of the postsecondary. Where are they going to find that?

Well, I'll tell you, because I've got a list here, based on this budget, that will add up to the \$820 million that will be spent on debt servicing come 2016. So I think it's time for some honesty from the other side. I'll just go through the list: wildlife management, \$24 million a year cut; fisheries management, \$8 million a year cut; the child health benefit . . .

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Wilson: If you're looking for clarification there on the other side, this is \$820 million in programs that you currently fund. You will have to find money to fund these because this will now be spent on servicing your \$21 billion of debt.

Child health benefit, \$28 million cut. That's the optical, drug, and dental benefits for low-income children. The insulin pump therapy program, \$8 million. Can't do it anymore. Child intervention supports for permanency, \$54 million. That's got to go. Protection of sexually exploited children, \$7 million. Can't afford that anymore; we're paying off our debt. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives, \$24 million. Sorry. Shelters for women, \$33 million; emergency transitional shelter support, \$38 million; provincial disability supports initiative, \$21 million; modular classrooms for high-growth areas, \$154 million a year. We're not going to be able to afford that anymore, Mr. Speaker.

Academic health centres for postsecondary institutions, \$21 million; addictions and mental health, \$48 million a year. Well,

we're not going to be able to afford that either. Special-needs assistance and project grants for seniors, \$31 million; cancer research and prevention, \$25 million; labour attraction and retention, \$40 million; labour qualifications and mobility, \$7 million; police assistance to municipalities, \$83 million; First Nations policing, \$12 million; organized and serious crime, \$30 million; municipal water and waste-water programs, \$75 million; Alberta Emergency Management Agency, \$10 million; PDD employment supports, \$31 million; immunization support, \$8 million.

If you add all of that up, you get to that nice round number of \$820 million, Mr. Speaker. Now, that's a lot of stuff. That is a lot of programming that Albertans rely on. So to sit there, stand up, and suggest that you are taking this province into debt because you're building Alberta without telling them what you're going to do to pay off that debt on the back end: shame on you.

Mr. Speaker, that is the fundamental difference between their party and ours. We believe that we can do some of the things that Ms Redford suggested when she was running in that election campaign two years ago. It is entirely possible for us to continue to provide the quality of life we have as Albertans without going into debt.

Thank you. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Human Services and move second reading of Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014.

At the centre of all the programs available through Human Services are the children and the families that we work to support. Our priority is keeping children healthy and safe. These are often the children who are most vulnerable because of challenges they have in their families that put them at risk, challenges like poverty, family violence, and addiction. Many Albertans point to the child intervention system as being responsible for assisting families to address their concerns and for keeping children safe when their parents are unwilling or unable to.

But everyone has a role, Mr. Speaker, in supporting children and families. The problems that they have are rooted in issues that are far greater than any one system, and they need a multisystem approach to solve. For those children and families who must receive support from the child intervention system, we are committed to ensuring that they have the best system possible to meet their needs. For this to happen, we need real change, with an emphasis on being accountable to all Albertans, most especially to the children and families who receive our services.

It also means building a culture of transparency, quality care, and continuous improvement in Alberta's child intervention system. That's why we believe that the amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will help improve accountability, transparency, and quality assurance. This will also improve our overall focus on continuing improvement and providing services aimed at keeping children healthy and safe.

These amendments to the legislation will also put in elements of the five-point plan, that was announced in January, that will, if fully realized, have a tremendously positive impact on Albertans. The five-point plan focuses on enhancing information sharing, addressing the root causes that bring children into care, and supporting collaborative research to improve services to children and families. Once fully implemented, Alberta will have a quality child intervention system that is robust in its assurance mechanisms and one that is based on a culture of continuous improvement.

Human Services has already completed the first two actions identified in the five-point plan. In January we hosted a roundtable to discuss investigations and reporting into the deaths of children in our province. We were fortunate to have 13 experts, 91 in-room participants, and more than 475 online participants sharing their viewpoints and their ideas about improvements.

Also in January we established the implementation oversight committee to accelerate activity on our five-point plan and prioritize responses to previous recommendations for improving the child intervention system. This committee is already very active in defining their role, and they have already provided their first report. They have also been working with the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance and the Child and Youth Advocate on how they can co-ordinate their respective mandates and their work.

The child intervention system has been criticized by family advocates, members of the opposition, media, and others for lacking in transparency and therefore, by extension, accountability. We heard loudly and clearly that the publication ban provisions of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act need to be changed, and we plan on doing just that, specifically amending that the ban no longer applies to deceased children. There are a number of families who have long asked for the ability to talk publicly about their deceased child. This change will give them that right. The current ban prohibits the publication of the name and/or photograph of a child and their family or guardian who are involved in the child intervention system. This remains unchanged.

In speaking with the families and the media about their concerns about the existing ban, they feel it is overly restrictive, especially compared with other jurisdictions. The amendment would enable the name and photograph of a deceased child and their parents or guardians to be published. It will also empower families to speak publicly about their children and to share their stories and viewpoints about their involvement with the child intervention system.

But there are times when it may be more appropriate for the name and photograph of a deceased child to remain private. That's why we've included a provision that allows for those closest to the child who has passed away to decide if they want information about that child or their family to be made public. In these circumstances family members or an interested party can apply to have the court impose a publication ban.

4:50

We are intent on making sure that Albertans are confident that our province has a leading system in place to support at-risk children and their families. Confidence is built upon the knowledge of and access to information about how the system works. It's also built on the understanding that there needs to be an intentional and comprehensive activity when it comes to quality assurance, continuous improvement, and learning from external reviews. The proposed amendments embed quality assurance requirements in the legislation and encompass the activities of the council for quality assurance, expert panels, and the committees and councils appointed by the council and the

director of child, youth, and family enhancement. This includes new provisions that will help with information sharing about child intervention services and provide statutory protection for internal quality assurance activities and reviews.

The Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance was established in late 2012 to help increase public understanding of and confidence in the child intervention system. A clarified and enhanced mandate for the council will provide additional means for ensuring that our system is continuously improving. While the council already has the ability to call an expert panel to review the death of a child, we propose that they also have the ability to appoint a committee to support quality assurance activities and that this committee would be protected by a statutory shield, the same as the expert panel's. In addition, embedding in legislation that matters must be included in the council's annual report, that is tabled in the Legislature, will provide additional accountability. This public report will also serve as a means of demonstrating progress in implementing recommendations and improvements related to quality assurance.

Another aspect of quality assurance lies with the director of child, youth, and family enhancement. Expanding the requirements of the director to release information to the public is a significant opportunity for increasing transparency and accountability in the system as a whole and when investigating and reporting on the deaths of children receiving child intervention services. With this new provision the director will also be required to publicly release information about the findings and about the recommendations resulting from internal quality assurance activities, including those reviews of death, serious injury, and serious incident.

The director will also be mandated to share statistical data about children and youth who are currently in the system or who have received intervention services in the past. With this provision the plan is to establish a gold standard for data sharing about child intervention services, the most comprehensive and integrated data set on a provincial child intervention system. This will not only be transparent, but it is important for research and informing the child intervention system in its future work.

Since the Child and Youth Advocate was established as an independent officer of the Legislature in 2012, he has been one of our highest levels of external quality assurance by identifying where improvements to the child intervention system can be made. We propose to amend the Child and Youth Advocate Act to expand the advocate's investigation powers to include the death of a child or youth that occurred up to two years following the child's involvement in the child intervention system. Through the recent release by Human Services of data related to deaths of children and youth known to the child intervention system, we became aware that a number of deaths happened postinvolvement.

We have spoken about the need to have a better sense of the bigger picture with respect to the challenges facing children and youth after they are no longer in the system. We agreed that changes to the legislation were needed to ensure that an expanded mandate for the advocate was supported by the Legislature. Enabling the advocate to conduct investigations for this subgroup of children and youth may bring to light changes and enhancements we need to make to our services.

As we mentioned earlier, we are committed to making real change that will help improve outcomes for Albertans and increase accountability and transparency. We have garnered support from Gordon Phaneuf of the Child Welfare League of Canada; Robyn Blackadar of the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research; and Tim Richter, chair of the implementation oversight committee and president and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to

End Homelessness. Your support in moving these changes forward is much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 11.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mrs. Towle]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to rise, for the first time actually, on this bill to offer up commentary with respect to its merits in second reading. There's already been a fair amount of conversation about this bill. Of course, it is one which is the outcome of the government's – well, failed negotiations would imply that there had been negotiations – failed consultations and their nonexistent negotiations with their employees and other public-sector employees about the future of their pension plan. The outcome, ultimately, is a series of changes which, in our view, jeopardize a number of different components of the pension plan and will reduce the security and the adequacy of pensions enjoyed by roughly 300,000 Albertans.

You know, I have to say that I am perplexed by this government and the way in which they choose issues to pursue. There's a notion of leading with your chin. It seems to me like this government has put on a blindfold and stuck their chin out, and it's just been sort of staggering through the last six months at every turn. This, of course, is a continuation of that pattern, and it's one that I suspect is not going to help them in the long run.

Nonetheless, we're dealing today with this particular bill, which is a problem. The minister has tried to suggest that this bill is good because it moves public-sector pension plans into a model of joint sponsorship. He says: "Well, look at us. We're doing what the unions actually told us they wanted when we consulted with them" – not. The fact of the matter is this, Mr. Speaker. You know what? This bill only does that after the government has completely loaded the dice and written all the rules and established all the legislation about what the joint sponsorship can consist of such that there is no such thing as joint sponsorship. They don't have any independence. The critical and important rules that unions and workers and other plan sponsors would have wanted to see in place are those that give them the flexibility to make decisions jointly in the best interests of all members of the plan. Instead, what happened is that we've got the government deciding to just write a whole bunch of rules and then hand over responsibility for the plan. Of course, that's not joint sponsorship.

Every time the minister says, "Hey, look, there's something good in this," I think people need to remember that it's not even that. Even the good things that they're trying to sell are not really what they are saying they are. That is sort of a continuation of a theme with this government. They're becoming increasingly distant from the facts in terms of the way they communicate about things. You know, we've seen a lot of it over the last few weeks, but this is just another example of them forgetting to mention the fine print, which has, you know, profound implications and consequences. That's the first thing.

The second thing, of course, is that the minister suggested: "Oh, no. We listened to the boards. We consulted with the boards, and we listened to what they had to say." Well, I don't know. I wasn't in the room. It's possible that they actually listened, but either way they then took what they heard, wrote it down on a piece of paper

and crumpled up the piece of paper and threw it into the garbage can and continued on their way. They consulted in much the way they consult with anybody that they claim they're consulting with. You know, they did an information session and then said: by the way, we're out of here.

5:00

So most of the original components of the changes that the government first put out to union members many months ago or maybe even a year ago remain in place. There have been minor tweaks, but quite frankly I think those minor tweaks mostly exist in the form of the clarity of the bill. In many cases what the government has done is that instead of overtly making the changes that many people asked them not to make, they've just given themselves oblique permission to make those changes by way of regulation at some point down the road.

As I was saying last night, when we were talking about Bill 10, any structure of legislation that leads to giving this government more authority to make decisions that impact working people behind closed doors is absolutely not on because this government not only has not earned the trust of working people in this province; they probably, worse than any other government in the country these days, have betrayed the trust of working people in this province and, in so doing, can't expect anyone to be anything but alarmed and deeply, deeply suspicious of all of the authority that this government is giving itself within this piece of legislation.

Now, the minister also suggests: you know, all we've done is that we've moved from a fixed COLA to a targeted COLA, and it may well be that someday there will actually be no difference in what people receive. Well, that again is simply not an accurate description of what this legislation includes. This legislation allows for the government to move from an 85 factor to a 90 factor and, in so doing, reduce the pensions that people were expecting to receive.

I was talking to a neighbour two or three weeks ago who went online and used the government's actual calculator to figure out what these changes meant to him. He is somebody that is about halfway through his career; he's about 44, 45 years old. What he realized was that these changes were going to mean about \$350 a month to how much he receives when he finally retires. That's based on the calculator that the government itself has put on their website. So it really surprises me, Mr. Speaker, when the minister gets up and says, "Oh, there's no change; nothing is going to happen," that we're all scaremongering because their own documents, their own resources contradict that.

The other and probably the most important thing that concerns me the greatest about this piece of legislation is the plan to impose a contribution cap on these pension plans. We know that what that means in the long run is that should the plan get into trouble, the only way we can deal with that trouble is by reducing benefits and not just by reducing the COLA. It's not just about reducing the COLA. It's about reducing benefits and reducing benefits that are paid out. So we know that that's what's contemplated through this legislation, and although it doesn't say it overtly, it absolutely gives authority to the plan to do that.

You know, it was interesting because the minister tried to say: well, it's not a target plan; we're just putting a cap on contributions. But, interestingly, when I was being briefed about this plan and briefed about the legislation, we were talking about Bill 10, and I was told, "Well, you know, many of the plans under Bill 10," which is not this one but the other one, "are for all intents and purposes already a target benefit plan because we have the opportunity for contribution caps in place for all of those plans already; so all we're doing is that we're making it more overt by

putting in this provision for a target benefit, which is to be contrasted with the defined benefit." Fair enough. That's probably true.

Then it's quite interesting that when the minister is up talking about Bill 9, he says: oh, well, we're not moving to a target benefit. The fact of the matter is that his own official sort of said: well, you start talking about caps and contributions, and that's kind of where you're going. We all know. We might not call it that, but that's what it is. Again, less than clear communication from this government. I really think that when you're doing something as substantive as what these folks are doing, you need to communicate clearly.

The other thing that's included in the bill which is very concerning to me, of course, is this notion of a moratorium on all benefit improvements till 2021. I mean, we don't know that that necessarily needs to be in place, but absolutely the government has decided that, if nothing else, we need to ensure that for the next seven years there are no improvements made to the benefit. Yet we can't predict that. Presumably, if we were in a target benefit plan, we could potentially do that. But, no, we're going to make sure that under no circumstances do we improve benefits until 2021, and at the same time we maintain the freeze on contributions. Again, you know, clearly, they are stacking the deck.

Now, there are so many problems with this bill that, of course, it is our view that we should not be proceeding any further with it. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 9. I will hand that over to a page.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll just pause, hon. member, and have the amendment distributed.

I think we're good, hon. member. This is a referral amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those who are unaware, this amendment moves that Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time but that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future." That is the amendment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this amendment, of course, is to begin by allowing for that actual consultation and negotiation and consideration of this issue that Albertans need to have. I know that a select group there in cabinet have convinced themselves that this is all okely-dokely, but I would suspect that a vast number of the Conservative caucus itself are not fully briefed on what this means. Either way, the fact of the matter is that most of the people who are impacted by this piece of legislation have not had an opportunity to really fully consider the implications of the changes, nor have they been given the opportunity to really fully communicate to this government, which is accountable to them by way of that trite, old, little institution we call democracy, to listen to what they have to say about this.

Because this has such an incredibly far-reaching set of consequences to the lives of so many Albertans, I would suggest that this not be a bill that we ram through at, you know, 4 o'clock in the morning as this government is scrambling to get out of the Legislature so they can run off and slap a whole bunch of ineffective bandages over their broken political vehicle.

5:10

The fact of the matter is that what we should be doing is actually putting on our good-governance hat and putting out a very clear, open, transparent process for everyone to participate in discussing what the consequences of this bill are, what the objectives of the bill are, the competing expert assumptions, the competing characterizations of what different components of the bill mean to pensions in the future for these Albertans. All that information should be fully canvassed and fully discussed by having this matter referred to the standing committee. Then, hopefully, that committee would move to have public hearings on it and to secure independent expert evidence. By doing that, we could ensure that we actually acted in the interests of those people who voted for us and got the best deal for those people, all people, not just those people but also the taxpayers that the Finance minister claims to be standing up for – frankly, I think that's a bit disingenuous – and let everybody in on the conversation. That is what we could do by accepting this amendment.

Of course, the reason for it is because there are just so many things that are wrong with this bill, Mr. Speaker. There are just too many ways in which the retirement future, the modest pensions, secured by 300,000 hard-working Albertans would be put in jeopardy if we continue down the path which is laid out within the terms of this bill. For that reason, we need to take a step back and do some due diligence and a much broader range of expert input into this.

When I realized that it was really, like, about 300,000 people whose retirement we were looking at impacting, we did a bit of research. You know, in the last election that party over there received a total of roughly 600,000 votes. This impacts 300,000 Albertans. You've got to think that a lot of the folks that voted for you actually are included in this group. I am quite sure that never once was the issue of fundamentally threatening the security of their long hard-fought-for, worked-for, earned pension something that was talked about in the election. I am pretty sure that that was not a platform piece.

So that's why I urge members to support this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona if there's anything salvageable in this bill or if the motion or the notice to refer this is just because, really, once you go through it, there's nothing left that's of use. I'm hoping you can comment on that.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, I actually think that people in unions are actually very practical folks, and the folks who are receiving these pensions are very practical folks. I talked about it last night. Unlike the people over there, the people that are receiving these pensions plan 20 years ahead. They have modest incomes, and they figure out how to provide for their own security, to have their houses paid off if possible, to have a little bit of savings tucked away, to have enough money to put food on the plate and buy Christmas presents for the grandkids, all that kind of stuff. They don't need their private jet. They don't need taxpayer-funded trips to the JPL. They don't need any of that kind of stuff. They're just planning to live a good life and contribute to their community and be part of their community when they retire, all that good stuff.

So they're more than prepared to talk about whether or not these pension plans are in true jeopardy. The fact of the matter is that to talk about it, you need to have a truly meaningful consultation process. You have to have a range of experts providing

information about what is necessary and what is not necessary and what's at risk and what's not at risk. You need to talk about what really, truly needs to be done based on the consensus of those experts in terms of where we end up going. What's happened here is that the minister has taken a relatively small problem and bootstrapped it into an excuse for fundamentally converting the nature of these pension plans. That's not the way we go about finding solutions.

To the extent that this bill actually allowed for joint sponsorship and genuine negotiation, then that part of the bill is good. There might be tweaks, ultimately, that would be something that everyone would agree to and think are reasonable in the circumstances, but we don't even have, as I said before, a true joint sponsorship. What we have is the minister writing all the rules and doing all the planning and then handing over responsibility for the pension once he's broken it. That's not joint sponsorship. Joint sponsorship at the front end of the changes is actually not a bad idea at all.

In answer to your question, that component of it is quite reasonable, but the problem is that the joint sponsorship is planned at the other end of the process, long after all the changes have been made, when it's no longer relevant. That's why we need to refer this to committee and restructure the components of it, do better research, expand the nature of the consultation, improve the quality of the consultation, establish negotiation processes and protocols, come up with fair and objective assessments that everybody can have faith in and have good trust in, and then move forward from there.

The minister suggested that he did consult with the boards of the plans, and you do need to know, Mr. Speaker, that this is not something that the plan boards are recommending. They are absolutely not recommending this set of changes. Just to be clear, this is something that is coming from that cabinet, that PC government, over the objections of the plan administrators and the boards, to whom they should be listening.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There is more time left under 29(2)(a). Are there any others?

Seeing none, we will go, then, to speaking on the amendment. This is, for the record, RA1. On RA1 I'll recognize the hon. Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Where to start? I guess what we see in this House on an ongoing basis is that when you fail the logic and the common-sense test, you go, you know, to the we-haven't-done-enough-consultation test. That's essentially what this amendment does.

I do need to highlight all of the work that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has done since July 2012. I know, as the associate minister of Finance back when that started, that the minister had all of the intentions and followed through on all of those intentions to do the consultation work with the plan boards and with Albertans. The truth of the matter is that the member wants to talk about the 300,000 stakeholders or people that are interested. Last time I checked, there are 4 million people in this province now, and they actually all have an interest in the sustainability of these pensions.

What the minister did back in July 2012 is that he asked the pension boards to go back and look at the challenges that they have with their particular pension funds and to provide him with some options moving forward about how we can as Albertans address this issue, not just for those that are members of these

pensions but for all Albertans, who potentially are on the hook for any future liabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the pension boards came back, some with some recommendations, some with no recommendations. In fact, the LAPP, which has had an unfunded liability for a good portion of the last 22 years, came back with no recommendations. The minister then had to sit down and work with his department people and take a look at what potential options are on the table.

5:20

The Minister of Finance has already stated – I'm of the same opinion, and I think it's probably the opinion of many in this House – that actually his original position was the thought that, you know, we might have to look at going towards a defined contribution pension plan. On how you implement that, whether you go with the Wildrose approach or what, you would have to ask some questions about that, but he thought that was the direction he wanted to go. But through consultation and through discussions with his department he has come to the conclusion that that's actually not the case.

To suggest that the Minister of Finance hasn't done this consultation and the proper due diligence on this is just not true, Mr. Speaker. In fact, his actions have suggested the complete opposite. After engaging the boards and asking them what to do and then engaging the Department of Finance on what to do and what options might be available, they put some of those options out there in the public. From September 16 of last year to December 31 Albertans were asked what their opinions were, and again many of the ideas that were put out there, based on the feedback that was received, were taken off the table, not all of them but a portion of them, the ones that didn't make sense, the ones where there were some rational or logical reasons as to why you shouldn't actually be doing that. As a result, the minister took that feedback, has come back, and has brought forward this legislation.

To suggest that there hasn't been any consultation or that there needs to be more consultation is, I think, frankly, just a way to try to avoid the issue and bury your head in the sand around the issue, that there needs to be some adjustments with our public-sector pension plans moving forward. These adjustments are well thought out, have sought the opinions of all Albertans. I think it's time to try to move forward with the legislation, have a healthy debate in this Legislature, have a healthy debate in Committee of the Whole, bring forward any amendments at that particular time, and move forward with the changes in the spirit of the legislation that the Minister of Finance has intended.

The Deputy Speaker: For the record, hon. members, amendment RA1. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre as well for allowing me to speak before her.

I rise to speak in favour of this amendment, and I'm going to list the reasons. Now, I do want to address some of the concerns that the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, I believe it is, raised, especially around consultation. That word has different meanings for different people, and I'll go through and give some examples of how I've had claims that the government has consulted. The best examples are really when it comes to consulting with our indigenous communities, or alleging to consult with our indigenous communities.

You know, again, the example that I brought up last night was the legislation that the government brought forward called the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act, which has the word “consultation” in it, so one would hope that there was some consultation actually done with different aboriginal communities. What we learned and, in fact, what all opposition parties learned from having dialogues with representatives from all three treaties was that there wasn’t consultation. So the government making a reference to bringing forward sometime down the road a piece of legislation to deal with levies to help enable aboriginal communities to consult was really the extent of it, yet the minister at the time would talk about how they’d consulted. Quite frankly, if you asked the aboriginal communities and representatives from treaties 6, 7, and 8, they’d have a much different response.

Now, jumping back to this amendment and to the bill, I just want to very briefly touch on the reason and the history of why we have pensions. I think it is something that shouldn’t be overlooked. When we want to attract quality workers to the public sector, as was even discussed this morning in Public Accounts, there are three different ways to remunerate workers, which is through their salary, through their benefits, and through pensions. Again, by stripping public-sector workers, 300,000 Alberta front-line workers, of their pensions, of their defined benefits, what they supposedly were to rely on, to count on for retirement security, knowing that it would be there – many of them have contributed their whole working life toward this plan, expecting it to be there. Suddenly, with the introduction of some legislation and the stroke of a pen, the Minister of Finance can completely change what these folks are going to be getting and expecting to get.

You know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, our offices have received hundreds and hundreds of letters from irate Alberta workers who, if I can put it into two words – well, maybe it would be three, then.

Ms Blakeman: Go on. I dare you.

Mr. Bilous: Well, that’s exactly it. “How dare you” is the theme of the letters. That was very creative thinking from the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Again, it’s folks who are irate, and they’re irate for a number of reasons. First and foremost, these plans have been looked at and audited by numerous groups who have said over and over again that the plans are back on track to paying off the unfunded liability portion of these plans. There are tools within the existing pensions to accommodate a downturn in the market, which is what happened in 2008, and these pension plans are working toward paying it off. It has to do with contribution rates and the fact that employees stepped up and agreed to pay more in order to cover the loss that occurred in 2008. The fact is that these pension plans, prior to this bill being introduced, were a shared responsibility between employer and employee. With some of the sweeping changes that this bill is proposing, it is really putting all of the onus onto the workers, onto the employees, and removing responsibility from the government and from, well, the chief employer.

You know, an issue that I have with the bill is that it removes from the board their already limited role in making fundamental decisions about plans and, again, gives broad, sweeping powers to the minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The decisions about the terms of the plans, the terms that actually affect how the plans operate for hundreds of thousands of Albertans who rely on these, will now be made behind closed doors, behind cabinet doors, which takes away oversight that members have had into how decisions have been made. Again, members are losing even more of a voice with some of the changes. The very folks who are,

I guess, wearing the changes or are going to be affected by the changes are the ones with the least amount of voice in the decision-making of what’s happening with their retirement.

You know, I’ve met with numerous constituency members who have come to me, having worked for 25-plus years for the government, dismayed at how this government is returning their loyalty and years of service by taking away something that was negotiated and was part of their contractual agreement when they decided to work for the government.

5:30

I mean, there are numerous other areas that I’m going to go through. The next is looking at COLA, which is obviously looking at cost-of-living adjustments, which was part of the defined benefit to ensure that the dollars that were put in as far as purchasing power and real spending will be the same on the other end. Now that that’s been removed or has been changed to a target, we could quite easily see that the value of the dollars that workers are getting are continuing to slide backwards, so they’re getting less and less year in and year out. When we look at the fact that the minister has claimed that these changes will not affect the defined benefit . . . [interjection] I agree that is quite a funny joke if it were actually funny.

Moving decisions as far as COLA, as far as contribution caps, which I’ll go through in a second, basically means that decisions are moving out of legislation into regulation, which, again, the minister can make with cabinet, Lieutenant Governor in Council, behind closed doors. When you look at setting contribution caps, which is one of the ways that pensions have been able to adapt to, say, years where the market is poorer or returns are not as good, that was one of the methods of dealing with that.

Again, looking at plans over a long term, when you remove the flexibility of these plans, whether it’s the cost-of-living contribution, you’re handcuffing the boards and the plans on what they can do to adapt to these problems or these challenges. So, basically, this is forcing the pensioners to accept less, because if you take away the contribution caps, if you take away the ability for the plan to adapt to poorer years, then the only other way to keep it sustainable is essentially to cut back on benefits, which is what this piece of legislation is going to do, what it is driving forward to do.

When you look at Alberta – and I mentioned this last night – we have the highest rate of inflation out of any province in the country. Again, in March alone the inflation rate in Alberta went up to 3.9 per cent, which is almost double what the Canadian average is throughout the country. When you remove COLA or change it from guaranteed to targeted, you are essentially reducing the benefits that workers have been promised, and you are reducing them year in and year out.

The other thing with this bill – I mean, there’s a long list of issues that I have with it – is when we look at the limitation of liability. The fact that Bill 9 adds a complete limitation of liability for benefit reductions or contribution increases . . .

The Deputy Speaker: You’re speaking to the amendment, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, absolutely. These are all reasons, Mr. Speaker, why this bill should not now be read a second time.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: And go to a committee.

Mr. Bilous: And go to committee, and it's what the committee needs to explore.

When we're looking at – I threw myself off – the limitation of liability, it basically means there's no recourse for the losses that are suffered by any of our Alberta workers who are our pensioners as a result of the reduced benefits.

Now, as I said earlier, currently employees retain about half of that risk even though, again, ironically, they don't have necessarily a proportional role when it comes to the plan governance. This bill is moving all of the risk onto the employees. So it gives the minister all powers, all decision-making authority regarding the plans that are affecting 300,000 workers except the minister bears none of the risk or liability. That's put solely onto the folks who have contributed to these plans from day one.

Another thing that's interesting is that part of this bill is looking at rolling the MEPP into the PSPP and talking about intergenerational equity. The minister claims that one of the aims is for more fair and equitable plans, but by making these changes, the government is actually increasing the burden on certain groups. Younger plan members are paying higher contribution rates to bring the plans back up to fully funded status, but they're doing that because they're under the impression or they're being told that their benefits are defined. So they pay higher now, and that will come back to them when they retire.

Ms Blakeman: And that's not the truth.

Mr. Bilous: No. That's quite far from the truth.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you could have the conversation through the chair, I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I know this corner of the House is very excited to talk about this awful bill.

By creating conditions for reduced benefits, the younger workers are paying now for benefits that likely they're never going to see, not if this bill passes. As well, by rolling the MEPP into the PSPP, government is placing an unfair burden on front-line workers, so managers, with their higher salaries and higher benefits, necessitate higher contributions of active members to be able to fund those benefits. With both levels of employees being rolled into the same plan and making the same set of contributions, the lower paid front-line workers will essentially be subsidizing the higher benefits paid to management employees, which is quite the opposite of being fair.

I don't know if it's been brought up yet, Mr. Speaker. You know, we talk about the 300,000 Albertans that this is going to affect, but I think it's worth taking a look more specifically at who those 300,000 workers are. I do want to mention it, and I had some statistics here. Again, to clarify for members of the House, LAPP and PSPP payouts are between \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year. We're not talking generous like, for example, the severance packages that communications staff out of the Premier's office get. We're talking about something that's very, very modest. Again, when we look at the average salary . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. I'm just very interested in what the member has to say about the extent of the benefits that are currently being received by pensioners and/or that will be received from working members of the province, public-sector workers, currently as well as potentially in the future and some

observations that the member was about to share with us in terms of those amounts. I'm wondering if he could share that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for asking that. Where I'm going with this, Mr. Speaker, is that, again, when we look at the salaries of the folks who are being affected, they average around \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year. These aren't, you know, AHS executive salaries that we're talking about here. These are modest salaries. But, again, folks who are earning \$60,000 to \$70,000 stand to lose nearly 15 per cent of their pension benefits with this current legislation.

5:40

What I wanted to draw attention to, Mr. Speaker, is that over 90 per cent of UNA members and over 75 per cent of HSAA members are women. This legislation is a direct attack on not only working Albertans but on women. We all know that in this province and in this country it is completely unfair – that's not even the right word. It's outrageous that women working in a position similar to men do not receive the same amount of remuneration. Women actually are paid less for jobs equal to men, which is something that is shameful and shouldn't be happening. When we look at this bill and its attack not just on Alberta workers, again, especially, this is an attack and unfair predominantly toward women and women in the workplace. This is something that the government, if it wasn't aware of, should have been aware of.

For that reason along with every other reason that I've outlined, the Alberta NDP and myself will continue to be vehemently opposed to this bill. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I strongly encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment to not now read this bill a second time and send it back to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There's still time left under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, hon. members, I have quite a long list of speakers, and I'll tell you who they are in order: Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Varsity. And might I remind you that we are now dealing with amendment RA1, please.

Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking at this bill and kind of wondering to myself what's going on with it. Where's the human element in it? It seems that our government has lost a bit of credibility on this one. The PC government has once again failed to lead by example. In the midst of the publicity surrounding the obscene severance packages their political staff have been getting, they're ramming through a pension plan change, and they expect that public-sector employees are supposed to take one for the team while they continue to spend lavishly. I just don't get it. I don't understand it.

You know, I went back and I talked to a few people that would be affected in my riding, and specifically I talked to some nurses. I've talked to them on several occasions. This isn't the first time I've talked to them. Really, they are the front-line services in our province, and specifically they're the people that are working hard to make sure that those who are sick get better. They are the ones that provide the service, and they are a group that are affected by this particular piece of legislation.

Now, they work very hard. They put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into the work that they do. They tend to work in situations

where they're understaffed and overburdened. They work very hard, they do wonderful things, they put their patients ahead of themselves, and they do that in situations that aren't always ideal. They put in extra hours, they worry, they care, and to be honest, right now they feel abandoned. That's what I'm hearing from the members that I'm talking to in my constituency.

They've requested help, they've asked for resources from their managers, they've asked for resources from the government, they've gone to AHS, and it's all fallen on deaf ears. It's funny to me that this government is willing to burn out this workforce that gives of themselves so very often. They're the workforce that we need to keep healthy because they keep us healthy, and they bring Albertans back into good health when they're not. The understaffing that they go through creates a lot of problems for them. They go through mental breakdowns. They take a lot of stress leave. It's unfortunate that we treat such wonderful people in such a horrible manner.

You know, I spent a good part of my youth watching what nurses do in our health care system. My mother was sick for a very long time. I watched nurses care for her day in and day out. Not only did they care for her as she was sick, but while I was there in the hospital, when I was visiting, the hours that I spent there with my mother, they actually cared for me, too. They made sure that my mental health was where it needed to be. They talked to me on many occasions about what was happening, what was going to happen, and what I needed to do to try and keep myself healthy. They would even cook for our family. We would get meals that would be given to us in the hospital from these nurses. Now, this wasn't part of their job description. This was just something that they did. They cared for their community. They cared for the people that were in their care and for their families. It's this compassion that I think sets them apart, but they are the front-line services, and they are affected by this piece of legislation.

Not only are they worried about their work conditions, the resources that they get, the supports that they get, the hours that they have to put in, and the toll that it takes on their families and on their own health; now they have worry about what their pension is going to look like. They've got to worry about their retirement. It's just not right, and it's not fair to go to these people, that are already overtaxed, overworked and give them one more thing to worry about because you're not negotiating with them. You haven't negotiated or bargained in good faith with these people, with these hard-workers. You haven't done it with all of the front-line services workers in this province, and it really is a travesty that you're not listening to the very people that do the work of this government, that provide the services to Albertans.

The changes proposed in Bill 9 could even allow the minister to alter pension plans without regulation, without recommendation from the pension boards. You're taking away their very ability to have a say in what happens in their pension. We could just have it with a stroke of a pen from this minister or a future minister changing the very nature of their retirement. That's not right. It really is not right. You can't do this to people. You have to support the contracts that you've signed. You need to honour the contracts that you've signed, and if decisions have to be made, you need to bargain and negotiate in good faith. This is a basic tenet of our society. You don't just pull the rug out from underneath a hard-working group of people because all of sudden you seem to think that the actuarial numbers don't work.

It's interesting that we hear that the actuarial numbers don't work from this government because we hear from other sources that there is a plan in place, that these unfunded liabilities were slowly being chipped away. I wonder why we're doing this right

now, why this government has put this forward in this manner. There really does need to be more consulting on this. There needs to be the ability for these people to stand up, negotiate, and find the solution to the problem rather than to have one dictated and imposed upon them.

This is the way our government works. We're not supposed to dictate and impose from this Chamber. We're supposed to go out, converse, listen, come back, and negotiate in good faith.

Now, I worry about the nurses in my riding, I worry about all of the nurses in this province, I worry about our public-sector employees, I worry about their future, and I worry about our future as a province when we fail to negotiate with those who do our work.

I'm not in support of this particular piece of legislation. I will be voting against it in second reading. I do not believe that our nurses, and specifically the one who carried a message to me on my graduation day from my deceased mother, who had carried it for five years – I do not believe that this is fair to her or that it is fair to any of those that she works with. I really to believe that they need to be consulted and they need to be negotiated with and that a solution can be found, but it's not this one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:50

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am in support of this particular amendment for a couple of reasons. I think, you know, we want to go way back and sort of ask ourselves how we got into all this and why.

But as the previous member mentioned, you know, there is a deal. There is a written and unwritten contract that everyone understands. I think the part of that that hasn't been considered by the government in all of this is the nonmonetary aspect of it. There was an expectation that workers came, that they worked for a particular employer, in this case the public sector, for an extended period of time. There was an expectation from the employer that there was loyalty, that they would be loyal to the company, that they would work in the best interests of the particular government department or agency, Crown agency, whatever, and in return for their service and for taking lower wages as they went, there would be a defined retirement benefit that they could count on over the long term and budget for over the long term.

I just want to remind everybody about the institutional memory that we gain with long-term workers in any sector. Just to put a little bug in your ear, some of the people during this debate have talked about, "Well, you know, what if people that are close to retirement just go pfft; nothing more for me here; I might as well go," and they take their retirement now, and off they go? Just imagine the municipal workers that we have that are in that kind of 55 to 64 range; in other words, early retirement; they could go now. What if they went? Imagine the institutional memory that's going to walk out the door.

Now, imagine if you take the number of workers in the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary, Bonnyville, Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Ponoka, Lacombe, a lot of those places that have municipal workers that are in that age range, and they go: "Pfft. I'm out of here. You know, why should I have loyalty to my employer here when they don't have loyalty to me?" Just think about how much of what we now take for granted in the smooth running of municipalities would disappear overnight because

those workers and that institutional memory will have walked out the door. It's just a little bug to put in your ear.

Remember that we had a hiring freeze in the '90s, so there is no cohort that comes behind them. That cohort that's sort of 45 to 55 or 40 to 55 is not there. The next cohort is in their 30s. So you're going to have the 55-year-olds, that know how to do stuff, walk out the door. Who's left? The thirtysomethings. Not that there isn't great potential there and not that some of them don't know what they're doing – I'm sure they do – but overall imagine the havoc in our towns, in our villages, and in our cities. Who is it that remembers: don't buy that particular kind of rock because it doesn't lay down as well as gravel when you're salting or sanding the roads and the highways? Where is that actually written down? It probably isn't. It's probably in somebody's head.

So, you know, that deal that was struck, that loyalty, that long-term relationship, that recognition of service and the provision of service: that's what's being pulled apart here. The weave of that is being pulled apart in what's being contemplated by the government in this particular bill.

There's a lot more to be considered here than what we've seen actually considered, so it should go to a committee to think about other things. I think it's a very valid point that's been made by others that there is a consultation gap here. The government seems to have talked to the board members of the plan, and then they put it out to the public. Who did we miss? Anybody? Anybody? The workers, the beneficiaries of the plan: that's who didn't get talked to here. So if you're looking for another reason why a committee could do some work, they could talk to the actual beneficiaries of the plan. The government very clearly talked to the board members. I just heard that they talked to the public, put it out to public, but didn't actually talk to the beneficiaries of the plan. That might be a bit of a problem here.

There's also a real hustle up in the timeline. I noticed that in some of the sections there's a – I mean, the government understands it in other places. There are sections in there that go:

“Oh. We've got to have a moratorium on this stuff while we allow the plan to get into place. You're not allowed to do anything to it until 2020.” You know, there's a six-year timeline to establish the plans and get them onboard. Yet what's the timeline we're working with here? Eighteen months. Whoa. What's the hurry? If you understand that it takes six years to get this plan moving, why do you expect us to do all the rest of this stuff on the front end in 18 months? I think there's a gap with that.

We've also had a number of: I'll put my stats up against your stats. That will probably continue through the rest of this debate. I think the stats I'm looking at are better than your stats. I think they come from a wider number of places. Today the Leader of the Official Opposition tabled something from the Canadian Institute of Actuaries. You know, I'm going to trust that a bit more than the government telling me that they've consulted with some people. Frankly, I don't find any government consultation now credible because you've not done what you've said before, and I'm holding that against you.

Now, I notice the clock is ticking by for us here, so I think what I'm going to do is adjourn debate on this amendment and look to be able to pick it up again this evening. With that, I would ask that we adjourn debate on amendment RA1, which is amending Bill 9.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I was looking at the time. I move that we call it 6 and that we reconvene tonight at 7:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, April 23, 2014

Issue 23e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 23, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 8 Appropriation Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 23: Mr. Wilson]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Bill 8. Maybe it won't surprise you that I will be voting against it and encouraging my colleagues to vote against it as well. I'll tell you a few of the reasons why. The evidence against voting for this budget has come fast and furious from some unlikely sources, two former Finance ministers and, today, the Auditor General.

Let me read into the record a few of the things that these honourable gentlemen have to say about the budget put forward by the Finance minister. Ted Morton, who of course was Finance minister, wrote on March 24, 2014, in the *Calgary Herald*:

For many PC faithful – and I was one – that was our hallmark, the PC brand. We may agree to disagree on social issues, but when it comes to paying our way and telling Albertans the truth about how much we are spending, and how much, if any, we owe the banks – that's untouchable. [The former Premier and the Finance minister] threw that brand overboard.

In one fell swoop, Alberta went from leader to laggard in public accounting clarity and integrity. For many veteran PCers, repealing the Klein-Dinning accounting rules was the final straw.

What does that other former Finance minister have to say about the new budget and the new presentation by the current Finance minister? Well I can tell you because Jim Dinning wrote in the *Edmonton Journal* on April 2, 2014:

I'd like to see a new leader take up the Opposition's idea of establishing an Independent Budget Office. Albertans would welcome an objective set of eyeballs on the government's finances. And let's return to the simple and clear accounting rules used to get our government back in the black. The budget is one of the most important things the government does, because it drives almost everything else. Albertans sacrificed a lot to have a debt-free future. We don't want that hard work put at risk, and we should be able to understand the government's books.

Now, I know the Finance minister likes to say that the books are clear and they conform to accounting standards, but we found that the Auditor General challenged that in Public Accounts this morning. Let me quote what our Auditor General had to say because he commented that the way the government presents the books

is not based on accounting rules, and, as has been said, it's a policy document. The Minister of Finance is preparing his budgets in accordance with that policy document. As simply as I can explain it, the policy document has a budget treatment which is not in accordance with accounting principles. I'll just take this opportunity, if I may, to speak a little bit longer.

And he goes on:

In my opinion it would be best for Albertans to have a budget presented before the start of the year in the same way that the actual results will be presented. The clearest picture of the province's finances comes from the audited consolidated financial statements. A constructed budget constructed at the end of the year is, in my opinion, second best.

How is it that the books are actually presented in the annual report? Well, I pulled out the annual report from last year, 2012-13, and I would direct hon. members to page 21 because it has a reconciliation summary right here in black and white that talks about what the revenue is, talks about the adjustments for the various other types of spending, has expense on a consolidated basis, and then gives a single consolidated financial statement basis showing the surplus or deficit in the given year. In 2012-13 that was \$3.1 billion.

What the Auditor General is saying is that the budget should reflect the statements that are going to be produced in June. We shouldn't have to wait until we get to June to find out what the deficit is going to be on a consolidated basis. Unfortunately, the current Finance minister seems to be prepared to ignore the advice of previous Progressive Conservative Finance ministers, in addition to the Auditor General, in following what the Wildrose has said all along is what we should be returning to, which is the very simple consolidated statement of revenues in and expenditures out and whether or not we have a surplus or a deficit.

We know why this is causing a problem. You can talk to eight or 10 different organizations that analyze the budget and get eight or 10 different estimates of what the consolidated budget deficit is going to be this year. We think it's going to be \$2.7 billion, but I guess we'll have to wait until we get the real consolidated statements to find out what that is going to be. It shouldn't be this difficult to figure out what the actual spending and what the actual revenues are.

For me to have been able to vote in favour of this bill, there were some key things that we were looking for, Mr. Speaker. We were looking for leadership from the top. We know that there is no possible way that you can get any kind of buy-in on negotiations with public-sector unions if you're not seeing leadership being taken from the top. We would have wanted to see the elimination of associate minister positions, reducing the number of ministers to 16. We would have liked to have seen them roll back the 8 per cent wage increase that was given to MLAs last year. We would have liked to have seen a cut in the pay for cabinet ministers and the Premier and a reduction in the size of the Public Affairs Bureau by at least half and prohibiting its partisan political activities. We would have wanted to see a cap on bonuses so that we were limiting it to something reasonable. Limiting severance packages: we keep on seeing almost every day why it is we need to see a limitation on severance packages.

We wanted to see a halt on the unnecessary extras to the new MLA offices in the federal building. Keep in mind that we made that recommendation before we found out about the sky palace and the special PC lounge for retired and other PC MLAs, limited only to the government party, with their special elevator so that nobody else is able to access those upper floors. We would like to have seen a cap on annual travel costs to \$500,000 for the Premier, the ministers, MLAs, and staff. We have seen in living colour over the last four months why that limitation is absolutely necessary to show leadership.

We also in the second case would have liked to see an end to corporate welfare. There's absolutely no way that you can argue to those who look to government and rely on them for services, our most vulnerable citizens, whether they're persons with developmental disabilities, whether they're individuals who are in

seniors' care, whether they're people waiting in long waiting lists, or whether it's parents who are concerned about crowded classrooms – there's no possible way that you can justify handing out grants to individual companies in the form of corporate welfare when there are unmet needs. We calculate that that is some \$500 million a year being spent in direct subsidies and grants, and we would have wanted to see an end to that.

We also wanted to see some effort to eliminate ineffective bureaucracy and empowering the front lines, in particular, significantly reducing the cost of government and AHS bureaucracy while continuing to support our front lines. Instead, what have we seen? Continued growth and management layers, seven or eight layers of management in Alberta Health Services; no return to local controls so that we can get more dollars down to the front line; sole-source contracting in every area but, in particular, in Alberta Health Services, knowing that we're not getting the best value for dollar because we're not seeing competitive bidding; in addition to that, contracting out of consulting services across a whole range of services that I think and most Albertans think are not the necessary business of Alberta Health Services. Those are the kinds of things that we would have liked to have seen in the budget. Unfortunately, this budget failed to deliver.

We also would have liked to have seen a capital plan that was over the course of a longer period of time and funded in a debt-free way. We've put forward our 10-year debt-free capital plan. We would have spent \$50 billion over the course of 10 years and done so without going into debt by changing the way that procurement is done and making sure that there isn't scope creep in these projects that causes them to continue to get bid up.

We also would have liked to have seen a new relationship with our municipalities. We proposed a 10-10 plan for funding municipalities through a community infrastructure transfer that would have ensured that more dollars got down directly to the people who should be making decisions. Again, another aspect of the budget that we can't support because we're seeing no progress in that regard.

Zero-based budgeting. The government talks about results-based budgeting. Unfortunately, it's delivering no results. We need to have a real zero-based budgeting approach.

We'd like to strengthen the Auditor General's office, and I think we're beginning to see exactly why the Auditor General needs more resources to be able to do value-for-money audits, not only because of the comments that he made today but the comments that he's made on the government's pension plan changes. In addition to that, we are very concerned about the sole-source contracting that we're seeing across the board in Alberta Health Services and other departments.

7:40

We want to see the establishment of a waste-buster program that would be protected by whistle-blower legislation. Many of the things that we are hearing about government waste are coming to us directly because the government's ineffective whistle-blower legislation, first of all, does not actually protect the whistle-blower, nor does it get the information out. This is the kind of thing that we need to do to ensure that we're empowering the front line and identifying the areas where we can get savings so that we can direct those to front-line spending on important programs for Albertans.

The last area is that we want to see a savings plan, a real savings plan. Unfortunately, this government initially came up with what we thought was a pretty good idea, the idea of earmarking and retaining a certain portion of the investment income into the

heritage savings trust fund. They undid all of that goodwill by identifying new ways that they could withdraw money from the fund so that they can spend it on a variety of different endowments, which we think is breaking and undoing the promise of last year. What we really need is the kind of budget that looks forward into the future 20 or 30 or 40 years.

If we'd had the kind of approach that we saw when Peter Lougheed first implemented the heritage savings trust fund, if at any point they had decided that they were just going to retain the value of investment income in the fund, it would be worth \$150 billion today. It would be generating some \$8 billion or \$9 billion or \$10 billion per year, which would have allowed us to wean ourselves off resource revenue. We could today, with a couple of good decisions having been made in the 1980s, be in a position more like Norway or Alaska, with a large fund generating enough income so that we're not only able to take care of today's needs, but we're also making sure that the next generations are able to benefit from our resource development as well. The absence of that type of plan, the absence of any type of forward-looking approach to take our heritage savings trust fund and grow it to \$150 billion or \$200 billion so that we can actually have that same kind of future is another reason why I can't support this budget.

I'll say one last word about debt before I finish, Mr. Speaker. This to me is the biggest broken promise of this government. Two years ago they were campaigning, saying that they would be able to get elected, not have any cuts to front-line services, not increase taxes, not run deficits, and not go into debt. Here we are two years later looking at a budget that projects that by the time we go into the next election in 2016, we'll have \$21 billion worth of debt, the same level, incidentally, as a former Premier, Premier Don Getty, who faced the same fate as the previous Premier for this party for probably exactly the same reasons. Twenty-one billion dollars worth of debt by 2016, generating some \$820 million in interest charges: that is going to cannibalize away from other program spending. When you're paying money on interest charges, those are dollars that cannot be spent on hiring teachers and nurses and doctors and putting it towards programs for the most vulnerable.

That is the reason why this budget must fail. The fact that this government has decided without a mandate to put future generations \$21 billion in debt and basically have no plan for how we're going to manage it and steward our resource wealth for the future so that future generations can benefit from that as well, that's the reason why this budget should be voted down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll go to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm compelled to talk because some things that were brought up by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I actually agree with. It centres around the way we have continued to finance this province, essentially treating the nonrenewable resource wealth as being a revenue source to be spent in one generation. If you see what has transpired over the course of the last 43 years since this government has been in power, that is exactly what has played out.

We've brought in some \$375 billion, maybe more, in nonrenewable resource revenue. If you take a look at, you know, what other societies have done, Norway, to be specific, has treated that nonrenewable resource revenue as something to be saved for the future. That society recognizes that once you take a barrel of oil out of the ground and you receive income for it, you are never

going to have that barrel of oil to sell again. That seems pretty clear. They recognize that principle, and they've invested that in a sovereign wealth fund. Okay. That seems to me a pretty wise thing to do, understanding that it is nonrenewable.

What we have done: I guess we've given lip service to the fact that we should save some of this. I do note that in the Lougheed years of this government they at least tried in some small way to do that, pegging 30 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenue to be saved. Over the course of that time, I believe, a relatively small sum was saved, probably exactly the amount that's there today. In fact, we haven't made any significant contributions to the heritage trust fund in the last 25 years.

Where does that leave us? Well, of that \$375 billion or so of nonrenewable resource revenue we've brought in, the governing party has only managed to save \$16 billion or so. Any way you cut it, that's not a very good record. If you're running around as a conservative party, allegedly being fiscal conservatives, that, to me, would be the basis point of how you judge that record. Where are we in terms of our nonrenewable resource wealth? How much have we saved? How much have we got going in for future generations? Have we set up a really dynamic society? Do we have the best running universities, the best running things?

If you've decided as a government to put that money into different vehicles – because there is some contention amongst people whether we should put this in a sovereign wealth fund or develop things today – one of those viable options could be to develop the best university system on the planet. Those decisions were not made – okay? – either way you cut it. Whether you put it in a sovereign wealth fund, whether you develop the best university system on the planet, or other things, those things were forgone for some form or fashion.

Of course, it's my postulation that instead of doing these things that would have made our society truly great and set up for the long run, we took the easy way out, Mr. Speaker. We said: "My goodness. You know, we can do most of it here. We can have nobody pay any taxes, and we can provide most of the services. Maybe we'll struggle sometimes, we'll do well sometimes, but we'll do the best we can in providing these and sort of we'll go along on that path instead of developing a real plan on what we're going to do with our nonrenewable resource revenue."

Given that that's what has transpired, here we find ourselves in the unenviable situation of facing an uncertain way forward and where we have embraced debt to the tune of \$21 billion by 2017. That's a significant number, and I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that that is approaching the debt that we saw this great province have by the time the 1993 election rolled around. We're no further ahead on that file. We're right back where we started, when we started recognizing that things had to change, okay? Somehow we don't have a handle on this yet. The government of the day, who has been in power for 43 years, does not have a leg to stand on if you evaluate them from where they are in terms of what they have done with the nonrenewable resource revenue.

One might argue that it's difficult for them to have a good record on whether they provided the services that individuals here in Alberta need. Look, we're short schools, we're short long-term care centres, we're short doctors, we're short a whole abundance of things that just scream that this government has not been paying attention to what is happening out there. I think that if we haven't learned from this, the idea that something has to give, well, then we're destined to repeat it. That is my great worry, that there appears to be a willingness amongst the governing party to say: "Oh, well, you know, this is okay. It allows us to carry on, to

pretend things are all right. The future revenues are supposed to get a little bit better, and maybe we can fool ourselves that this time we might save a little more. This time we might do a little better." But if we haven't learned that that hasn't transpired and we haven't changed anything to ensure that it doesn't transpire, well, we're kidding ourselves.

7:50

Here's where I mean, that something had to give. This is where my and the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's, I guess, trails diverge, shall we say. I see the problem in regard to us spending all our nonrenewable resource revenue on the basis of a lack of revenue. We have a revenue problem, and I don't think – she mentioned former Finance minister Ted Morton, who says that our new accounting methods are a sham. Well, Minister Ted Morton has also admitted that we have a revenue problem. So has virtually every other Finance minister who has been in charge of this government's books going back a long way, whether they be Jim Dinning, whether they be Ron Liepert, whether they be a whole host, a cadre of characters and public servants who have had that position. If we don't get a handle on that, I think we're destined to repeat it.

So that's where we are. I hoped we had learned from this. It doesn't appear that this government is going to do anything but hope the status quo carries the day through the next election, and that is the greatest disappointment, where I see where we are now. I sense that if they would have tried to have solved this problem, a whole host of their other problems would have gone away because this is the elephant in the room, why we are at this stage of the game broke, okay? That really is it. Anyone who hasn't really tried to think about that in this Legislature, really, I think, should. If you haven't at this point in time asked yourself how we as a province find ourselves broke, I think you should. Give it a 20-minute academic study and ask yourself and come to a conclusion one way or another. Have we spent too much? Have we undertaxed too much? Figure it out for yourself what that is, okay? Then try and devise some plan going forward in that regard, but it doesn't appear that we're going to do it.

Essentially, if the government of the day had chosen not to do nothing, I think many of their problems would have gone away. You wouldn't see a lot of this nuttiness, in my view, of what we see on Bill 45, Bill 46, bills 9 and 10, the attacks on working people. I think you would have an easy way to build 50 schools and 70 modernizations, which the government still hasn't figured out. Although they promised it, they still haven't figured out how to pay for it. I think you'd have an easier time getting long-term care to seniors and people with disabilities who need it. I think you'd have an easier time trying to delve into solving child poverty, which you promised to eliminate. Those were big-ticket items that you guys said that you were going to fix, but the only way you can fix them was to fix the fiscal structure. When you didn't do that, you decided to come up with a bunch of other phony baloney arguments to say why we couldn't do it. Simply put, I think it was gutless and, in my view, wrong, and I don't think it is going to serve your political interests in the long run anyway. In my view, you blew it, but, hey, that's sort of where I am on that. I just felt compelled to say it one more time for the record, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his excellent albeit far too brief speech and ask him a little bit more about what he thinks the royalty structure ought to be in the province with a view to balancing the need for investment and revenue for the province, which – I agree with him – should be primarily used for savings for future generations.

Mr. Hehr: Well, this is a complex question. Nevertheless, I think if I had to look at it, the fact that we charge the lowest royalty structure on the planet for our nonrenewable resource revenues I think has something to say of the position where we are, okay? That's clear. Am I an oil and gas expert? No. I'm a recovering lawyer. But if you look around and you see where we are in terms of the amount of royalties collected vis-à-vis other nations, clearly we are not doing well in that regard.

My understanding is that the oil wealth is owned by every single citizen in the province of Alberta and we should be collecting as high a royalty rent as we can. Simply put, we have a policy that says we actually have a goal of being in the bottom collectors of rent in the world when it comes to royalties. It seems like our policies are based on some skewed notion that the royalties are not, in fact, the people's but the companies' who drill them, and that to me is perplexing.

Nevertheless, the reason we find ourselves here was that in 1993, in my view, we made a mistake in selling the Alberta Energy Company, okay? That was a company that Lougheed had started and built a petrochemical industry around, where the government had a stake in being able to control some portion of the oil and gas industry, and it was roughly 50-50. The Alberta government controlled 50 per cent; the private sector controlled 50 per cent. It had some balance as to what was happening out there. The government essentially knew what was happening in the industry.

When we lost that ability to have that understanding, it became very difficult to push back on oil companies. For instance, if you tried to say that we're going to raise royalties, well, they threatened to leave, and they'd tell all their employees that, my goodness, if the government takes a cent more, we're gonna fire every last one of you. That happens, and that makes it difficult for this to occur. So in my view, that was a mistake. But, clearly, at some point in time we have to look at ourselves honestly. Are we doing well on that front?

If we get back to the revenue collection, it has to happen on our royalties, our royalty structure, as well as citizens of this great province have to realize they have to contribute to the public purse. At the end of the day I think a much larger portion of our nonrenewable resource revenue, whatever our royalty structure is, should be saved for the future. I honestly think a reasonable position of any political party would be that you pay for what you use in taxes. If you can't provide the service or get the electorate behind the services you want to deliver as a government, you don't provide those services. If you don't want to provide those services, you don't want to run those deficits. That's how it is.

I think your society has to decide what they want. I believe Albertans at this time want public education. They want hospitals. They want roads. They want all of this. We just have to make the case that it's worth them investing in. I think the government, instead of trying to make that case, has taken the easy way out.

Thank you for your question, hon. member. I look forward to this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have 30 seconds left on 29(2)(a).

If not, the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on third reading.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate that excellent answer, which was not too brief. I just wonder why you feel that the Conservative government has been so extraordinary in its generosity to the oil companies in this province?

8:00

The Deputy Speaker: I recognized you to speak to third reading, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Oh. You said I had . . .

The Deputy Speaker: No. It was over. It went. Your time has started for speaking to third reading, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: But didn't you say that I had 30 seconds?

The Deputy Speaker: You did, but it's expired, long expired. Your preamble used that time, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: You may continue to speak to third reading.

Mr. Mason: I didn't know we moved seamlessly from one to the other, Mr. Speaker, but I'll try to adapt.

I will attempt to answer my own question, which has to do with this government's extraordinary generosity towards the large oil and gas companies that operate in this province. Sometimes we misjudge the government. We look at their policies towards poverty and housing and persons with disabilities and seniors, and we think that they're selfish. We think that they're mean-spirited and that they don't really care. But when we look at the oil and gas industry, we can see the most extraordinary generosity, that is unmatched, I think, anywhere in the world.

The value of the oil and gas that belongs to all Albertans is shared without any qualms or recriminations with the oil companies that are so friendly with this government. They have a very close relationship. It's something, really, that we all have to admire. You know, the oil and gas companies give the PC Party lots of money at election time, and then after the PC Party is elected, they give even more money to the oil and gas companies by keeping royalties at the lowest level of any jurisdiction in the country. You know, it's a very, very loving relationship, I think. It's very close. The only problem with it is that the value of our resources, that are being pumped out of the ground, in terms of conventional oil and gas and now unconventional gas and, of course, the oil sands, is enormous. It's billions and billions of dollars.

In the past 20 years or so Norway has established its sovereign fund. They have quite a bit higher royalties than we have in Alberta, and they save those royalties. They've invested them in a fund. Their fund was actually modelled very consciously on the heritage savings trust fund, established by former Premier Lougheed, and they followed the principles that Premier Lougheed had established, which were to put the money there, to keep adding, to have a certain, fairly high percentage of your nonrenewable royalty revenue go into the fund, and you keep it there. You don't draw down interest and use that for operating costs, and you let the fund grow and grow and grow.

That's what Norway has done, and they have had approximately the same value of oil and gas taken out of the ground that we have here in Alberta, and they have a \$600 billion fund. They invest that, and they're very careful because they don't want to create distortions in their own economy, so they invest it all offshore, not

in Norway but in other places. That fund is now producing tremendous returns. The standard of living of the Norwegian people has risen.

Mr. Denis: So have their taxes.

Mr. Mason: Their taxes have gone down, and they have expanded the social services that they all enjoy. The prosperity in Norway is amazing, and it's certainly surpassed Canada in terms of its standard of living. It's as a result of these wise policies that were originally developed by our own Peter Lougheed, who, ironically enough, was the first Premier and leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta. Seemingly because of the close relationship that's developed with the oil and gas industry, this government has moved in a different direction.

You know, it's interesting. We had a bit of a look at what Peter Lougheed did. He was very concerned when he became the Premier that the Social Credit Party was only collecting about 10 per cent of the value of these resources in royalties for the owners. The rest of it was going to the oil and gas companies. Certainly, they need to have some return if we're going to expect them to invest in the extraction and processing and transportation and sale of our natural resources. You need to allow them to have a certain share of the value of those resources in order to make sure that they have enough incentive to do that. But the question is: how much is enough? What we should be doing is allowing just enough to provide the incentives for them to make those investments at the level that we would like to see as a matter of our public policy, and everything else should be coming back to us.

Peter Lougheed said: "Well, we're only getting 10 per cent of the value under Social Credit. I want to set a different goal. I want to set the goal at 30 per cent." So they did. There were a couple of major changes to the royalty regime under Peter Lougheed. The oil companies squawked. They certainly did screech and scream, and they threatened to leave the province, but – guess what? – they didn't. In a couple of years they actually exceeded 30 per cent of the value, and they started to build up the heritage savings trust fund. I remember that period. It looked very, very promising.

Now, since Peter Lougheed left office, the oil and gas industry has exerted more and more and more influence over the PC Party and over the government. Under Premier Klein the percentage of royalties that was collected was reduced very substantially, and this government has continued that policy.

There was a brief glimmer when Ed Stelmach, who was the Premier, tried to adjust the royalty rates, and I think that he had some problems on the conventional oil and gas side, which is extremely complex. There were problems with regard to that, but frankly I thought, Mr. Speaker, that it was a step in the right direction with regard to the oil sands in particular. I remember the oil and gas companies claiming that this was going to bankrupt them and they were all going to leave. They had some phony demonstrations outside the Legislature, where they gave all their staff the day off and bused them to the Legislature, and nobody took it very seriously.

Then, unfortunately, there was a really serious economic downturn, and the price of oil and gas dropped. The oil companies are nothing if not kind of cagey, Mr. Speaker. What they did is that they blamed the drop in activity not on the downturn in the economy and the drop in the price of oil – oh, no – but they blamed it on the regime that had been established by Stelmach and convinced a lot of Albertans that that was what the problem was. Of course, people forget one thing, and that is that royalties are calculated as a percentage of price, so they have a percentage of

the impact that price does. If the price falls \$10 and your royalties are \$1, or 10 per cent, then obviously it has 10 times the impact than the adjustment in the royalties. The impact is a fraction of the impact of the price. Of course, that scared off the government.

Then they did something else. They're pretty smart, and they've done this before. They used to support the Western Canada Concept when they didn't like what Don Getty was doing. I remember, when I was in university, the election of a guy called Kesler, who was basically an oil field – well, he observed other companies' activities. I think it would be a little rude to call him a spy. He was elected in the Olds-Didsbury constituency, and that kind of scared Mr. Getty and the PC government at that time so that kind of brought them back into line a little bit.

What they did after the Stelmach royalty regime is that they tried the same trick again, only they did it on a bigger scale, and they started to shift their funding towards the Wildrose Party. That really scared the Stelmach government. They were quite, quite scared – not as scared as they are now, but they were pretty scared – so they backed off on many of the aspects of the royalty changes that Mr. Stelmach had brought about. Anyway, the genie was maybe out of the bottle.

But it's interesting that both parties, both the PC Party and the Wildrose Party, are completely opposed to reconsidering our royalty regime in this province. On the big issues these parties are the same, Mr. Speaker. They are not different. They have a difference of opinion over corruption and government waste and borrowing for capital projects, but that's about it.

8:10

Mr. Anderson: And we're nicer.

Mr. Mason: Well, they are newer, and they have not had a chance to do the kinds of things that 40 years in government, you know, brings about. I don't know how long it'll take them to get there. But they maybe have the advantage, if not of being more progressive, at least of being newer. There is something to be said for that, Mr. Speaker.

Now we're in the position where we still have the lowest royalties in the world, and we are getting less benefit from our oil and gas than just about any other jurisdiction in the world. Now, I don't think we have to go as far as Venezuela, for example, Mr. Speaker.

Some of you may have heard this story. If you have, you know, just stop me. [interjections] Or try. About five or six years ago I went up to Juneau, Alaska to find out what they had done with respect to their royalty regime. I met with lawmakers in their House on both sides, both Republicans and Democrats, and I also managed to have a briefing from the governor's staff, and I met briefly with the governor. She had led this process and brought about a substantial change in the royalty system in Alaska.

They looked very closely at Alberta. They studied Alberta's royalty system very carefully. They provided me with the documents where they had done this analysis. They brought about changes. For example, I remember one figure that stuck out in my head. They had made these changes to the royalties so that at the price of a hundred dollars a barrel Alaska gets 60 per cent more in royalties per barrel than Alberta does. I mean, it varies according to the price, of course. But that was the difference. Now, it's interesting that this process and this change in royalties was done over the objection of the oil companies, who threatened to leave. Of course, they squawked, and they made all kinds of noises, and they threatened to walk out and leave Alaska and never come back. Of course, they never did. They never did leave. They stayed.

Now, it's interesting that this change was brought about in Alaska under the leadership of a Republican governor. Her name was Sarah Palin, and she brought about this change and has certainly improved the financial position of Alaska, improved the payments that they give to their citizens, and so on. So I have a question for the Conservatives in the House, Mr. Speaker. If a gun-toting, Bible-thumping, right-wing Republican can raise royalties on the oil companies in Alaska, what the heck is wrong with you guys?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Job, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you. Now, this was phenomenal. While working, I was listening attentively to our colleague from the NDP caucus. You made what you purport to be factual statements about Norway, and you're indicating that their taxes are lower. Well, a little check of the government websites for Norway tells us that they actually have 48 per cent income tax, and they have 25 per cent GST. They don't pay transfer payments because they're not a province. They're a country, so they're not carrying the weight of other provinces and not transferring any of their funds to other areas. So that's one thing I'd like to have you reconcile, the facts from the government statistics versus what you're purporting over here right now.

Second thing. You're talking about conventional oil both in Alaska and Norway. Can you tell us about the difference in investment that companies first have to make in order to get bitumen, the first barrel of oil, out of the ground versus oil just gushing out of the sea? Can you talk a little bit about that?

And can you maybe give us a news flash update: how did Governor Palin do after all those reforms? Is she still the governor of Alaska?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll take them in reverse order. Now, Sarah Palin suffered from some of the afflictions that sometimes affect conservatives in government, and guess what? There was an investigation into her expenses, and she resigned as governor. Sound familiar, Mr. Speaker?

I asked that question, believe it or not, hon. jobs minister, when I was up there. They said that because the recovery on the north shore is very difficult – first of all, it's offshore drilling; it's in Arctic conditions; they have lots of problems – it's actually quite expensive.

But I would remind the minister that the break-even point for oil sands production is generally somewhere around \$40 a barrel in terms of price, so anything above that is very profitable. One of the top consultants in the world on royalties that was engaged by your government back in the time of the Stelmach changes wrote – and I still have his report – that the operations of Syncrude and Suncor are two of the most profitable enterprises on the face of the planet. That's despite or because of the royalties that you're providing at the expense of all Albertans.

With regard to the information that the minister has with respect to Norway's tax regime, it differs from the information I have, and I'll have to get back to him on it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise to ask unanimous consent of this Assembly for a one-minute interval bell for any standing votes this evening.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Speaker: The bells will be 10 minutes. Thank you.

So we're back to the bill. Are there other speakers on the bill?

Does someone wish to close on behalf of the Minister of Finance?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:20 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bhardwaj	Griffiths	Pastoor
Calahasen	Johnson, L.	Quadri
Casey	Kennedy-Glans	Sandhu
Cusanelli	Klimchuk	Sarich
DeLong	Kubinec	Scott
Denis	Leskiw	Starke
Dorward	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Drysdale	McDonald	Weadick
Fawcett	McQueen	Woo-Paw
Fraser	Oberle	Xiao
Goudreau	Olesen	Young

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hehr	Stier
Anglin	Mason	Strankman
Barnes	Notley	Swann
Bikman	Pedersen	Towle
Eggen	Rowe	Webber
Fox	Sherman	Wilson
Hale	Smith	

Totals: For – 33 Against – 20

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 23: Ms. Blakeman]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members we're dealing with amendment RA1, and I'll recognize the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I understand it correctly, we are speaking to an amendment to put this to committee. Is that correct?

The Deputy Speaker: That's correct.

Ms Smith: Thank you. I'm making a list of all of the points that I have about why this should be put to committee. I'm not sure if I'll be able to get through them all in my allotted time, but suffice to say that I'm speaking in favour of the motion.

I think we have to talk about why it is that we've gotten to this point. It's because the government is worried that the contribution plans for our public-sector pensions are going to have contribution rates that are going to be too high for not only the government to be able to shoulder but also for employees to shoulder. From what I understand from talking to members of our public-sector unions and others, the upper bar that the government wants to maintain for contribution rates is a combined total of 25 per cent. I think that even the union leadership recognizes that if you get much beyond that, you're going to face a backlash from your employee groups. They're not interested in seeing contribution rates go much above 25 per cent, but there is a fundamental difference of opinion between the union leadership and this government on the solvency of the plans and the nature of the unfunded liability.

I want to start by saying that the issue that we're seeing between the government and our union leadership when it comes to making these unilateral decisions to change the pension plans, particularly for the two plans, the LAPP and the PSPP, is that we've got a fundamental issue of respect. Do you respect the independent nature of the pension boards to be able to govern themselves or not? You know, in answer to a question that I asked today in question period, the Finance minister waxed eloquent about the independent governance that he was going to consult on possibly moving towards, but I have to tell you that that is not gaining much traction with the union leadership.

In fact, I'm sure Gil McGowan is going to be as surprised as I am that I'm going to be quoting from a letter that he sent, that was cosigned with Guy Smith, Heather Smith, Elisabeth Ballermann, and Marle Roberts, that states, "handing governance to employees and employers after the plans have been gutted is a little like an arsonist handing you the keys to your house after he's burned it down."

If you're going to move to an independent governance body, you have to do so by maintaining the factors that keep the plan solvent. Unfortunately, with the decisions that are coming through or the changes being proposed by Bill 9, solvency is going to be one of the factors that's greatly at risk. I can see why the union leadership is very concerned that making a move to independent governance after you've already wrecked the plan is not going to move you in the right direction.

There are a couple of things I think we need to have context in as well. I don't want us to mistake the frustration and disgust that Albertans have about the lavish overcap pensions paid to senior executives and managers that we keep on seeing, that are sometimes in the order of a million dollars or more, with what our front-line union workers are receiving through each of these plans. In fact, the local authorities pension plan has an average pension on an annual basis of \$14,456. Our public-sector pension plan has an average pension of \$12,732. These are very reasonable amounts of money. These are not excessive amounts of money by anyone's standards. These are not gold-plated pensions that we're talking about. It shouldn't be surprising because most of the workers who are in each of these two plans earn around \$65,000 to \$70,000 per year. These are not lavish pensions because these are not highly, highly paid employees who are in these two different plans.

The other issue that we have to talk about is an issue of fairness. I can tell you how frustrating it is for our front-line workers to continue to see that perks and benefits go to not only politicians but also senior managers, and then they're the ones asked to take it

in the ear. Let's recall that last year the managers' pension plan was increased. It will ultimately be wound down, but you can't increase the amount of compensation and benefits that you're going to give to your managers and then tell your front-line workers that there's not enough money left over for them. It is an issue of fairness.

The other concern that I have is the lack of information. As I mentioned, the 25 per cent combined contribution rate is a concern. In looking at the actuarial figures put forward by the Alberta Federation of Labour, they even acknowledge that for the next few years, in the worst-case scenario, the contribution rates may have to go up slightly, but it's only up to about 27 per cent, they would think, that at the outset would be the highest amount in combination that they would have to have employers and employees share.

What doesn't get talked about is that about one-third of this amount is already an amount that is apportioned to the unfunded liability contributions, about 7 per cent that's currently going to pay down the unfunded liability. Why is that? Well, it's because they recognized in the management of these pensions years ago that they had to deal with this unfunded liability issue, and they started doing that in 2008.

In fact, even the government recognizes that the plans are well on their way to solvency. When you look at the comments of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, he talked about it solving itself within 12 years. The AFL's predictions suggest that it's more like nine years. In fact, in the best-case scenario, if Leo de Bever keeps having great success in managing the accounts as he has in the last year, it could actually be eliminated in as soon as five years. Once that unfunded liability is eliminated, so are those additional premiums that go along with it, so you'd be able to get within the government's defined contribution threshold within very short order, by about 2020 at the latest. So the fact that the government thinks that they have to cap contribution rates I think is not borne out when you look at the fact that over the next five or six years these contribution rates are going to come down.

8:40

The other absence of information that we have is that the government is arguing that part of the reason they fear an increase in contribution rates by about 4 per cent is because there's going to be a change in the mortality tables. Well, we won't know what kind of impact that's going to have on contribution rates and the solvency of the plan until we see the new actuarial reports for these two funds, which aren't going to be released till June. So why race ahead and try to fix a problem right now until we know the true nature of the problem? We're not going to find that out until June. It would make sense to put this forward to committee and wait for these reports to be tabled so that we can actually see the true impact that the change in the mortality tables is going to have to the solvency of the plan. That's another reason it should be put to committee.

The other piece of information that AFL has been asking for is a freedom of information request if you can believe it, Mr. Speaker. We know how difficult it is to get those these days. They have been asking for every actuarial report and analysis that the government has done in determining that this is the draconian approach that they need to take. Surprise, surprise; that information has not been released yet. It would seem to me that until that information is released, we shouldn't jump ahead and assume that there's a problem here when it looks as though there's competing information out there, that it may be able to solve itself.

Now, I know that my colleagues in the NDP and the Liberals will have all sorts of progressive and liberal reasons to oppose this

legislation, but I've got some conservative reasons to oppose this legislation. I'm going to try to make the case to Gil McGowan that he's actually a conservative because when he and I were talking today, you wouldn't believe how many areas of agreement we actually had.

Let me talk about why I as a conservative am opposed to this legislation. One, the rule of law. We expect that our governing officials are going to operate within the rule of law. Well, what does the current rule of law actually say? If we go to the legislation, the law says that the Finance minister can only change the provisions in this plan on the recommendation of the pension plan boards. Here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. He didn't get that approval in making these changes. Instead, he does what the PCs always do when they bump up against legislation that they don't like. He's proposing Bill 9 to give him unilateral power to make a ton of changes that the pension boards don't agree with. He is giving himself absolute authority. He wants to change the early retirement rules. He wants to be able to change the cost-of-living rules. He wants to be able to unilaterally cap the contribution rates.

There is a clause in here as well about potentially having the Finance minister change the treatment of salary for the calculation of benefits, changing the vesting rules. All of this is going to be determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, by cabinet. That goes away from the existing structure that we have right now, where the Finance minister is confined by current legislation.

I just don't like the practice that the PCs get into of trying these workarounds in legislation when they find pieces of it that they don't like. So that's one reason I'm opposing it.

Another reason I'm opposing it is that you know that as conservatives we value local decision-making. Many of the changes that this government is bringing through are going to have massive changes on other orders of government, particularly our municipal orders of government. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties have gone on the record expressing their concerns about the changes that are being proposed by Bill 9. They think that the government is making a fundamental error in treating the local authorities pension plan the same way that they're treating their public-sector pension plan. In the local authorities pension plan there are three workers to every retiree. In PSPP there are two workers for every retiree. So it's very clear by looking at those ratios that there are probably unique risk factors and unique resolutions to each of those. You can't treat them the same, but the government is attempting to treat them the same under this legislation.

The big issue that the municipalities are raising is the impact that these unilateral changes will have in their ability to attract qualified labour. Our municipalities are in a fierce competition for workers. One of the advantages they offer is an attractive benefits program so that they can attract individuals into the public service as opposed to the private sector. They're very worried that on the calculation of benefits over the long haul, young workers are going to opt for other jobs and that they're going to end up seeing an exodus of young people from their labour force.

The other reason why as a conservative I oppose this is because I respect contracts. When you're making changes to pension plans – and this is what was brought forward by the AAMD and C – it involves three parties: the employer, the employee, and the retirees. All three of them have to be at the table and involved in coming up with solutions to a plan solvency. The government is throwing that out the window, ripping up contracts. We've talked about this a number of times in the past when the government wants to behave in a unilateral way without respecting the sanctity of contracts.

The other reason I oppose it is that I respect private property rights. One of the big debates through the 1980s, when we were talking about having property rights vested in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, was whether or not entitlements should be considered a property right, an entitlement program like a pension program. I would argue that when somebody puts their dollars into a fund and it is matched by their employer, they have a right to expect that the provisions under which they bought into that plan are going to be consistent over the course of their lifetime. When you look at what these changes are potentially going to do, there's a potential that it is going to reduce the value of this entitlement by up to 25 or 30 per cent for new, young workers, slashing 25 to 30 per cent off the retirement value of every worker's pension plan, and it has a disproportionate effect for our youngest workers.

The problem that we're also seeing is that the government is not being entirely accurate and forthright in trying to split the different groups. It's sort of a divide-and-conquer strategy that we've seen, and we're accustomed to seeing that with this government. They're trying to tell those current retirees, who are already accepting their benefits, that they're not going to be impacted by these plan changes. However, that's not quite true because the government has given themselves an escape clause on page 17 of the bill. I'm looking at section 15, which would revise section 4(2)(a). In here it says that council may amend or repeal and replace plan rules

only on the Board's recommendation if or to the extent that the effect is to change benefits that relate to service that occurs or occurred before 2016, unless the change deals with vesting or the treatment of remuneration as salary for the purposes of calculating benefits.

The way the unions are reading that is that they actually can change the benefits for those who are currently on the plan and receiving the benefits if they change the vesting and if they change the treatment of remuneration for salary. That means that perhaps rather than having the best five years of an individual's employment record go into the calculation of benefits, the Finance minister has given himself the power to change that. Maybe it would only be the average five years, or maybe it's only the best three years. In any case, these are the kinds of provisions that have been inserted into the legislation that leads unions to believe that whatever they're telling current retirees, there is an escape valve that could allow them to break that promise.

The problem with the government is that they have no credibility with our front-line workers now. I mean, you could have perhaps in the past argued that you could trust the Finance minister, that he would never do the kind of things that we're talking about, but of course I think our public-sector unions trusted that they wouldn't have their collective bargaining rights snatched away in Bill 45 and that they wouldn't have their free-speech rights snatched away in Bill 46, and those two things happened. This is why the trust level that we have between our front-line workers and this government is at probably the lowest point that we could possibly imagine. This is why, when they look at this legislation and see the power that the government is taking away from their pension boards and giving to the Finance minister to have behind closed doors in a unilateral way without the need to consult, they're suspicious of how those are going to turn out for their existing retirees and their future workers as well.

The other issue that we have – and we talk a lot about it; we talked about it in the previous bill as well – is the intergenerational issues that we're facing when you make these kinds of unilateral changes. As we know, younger workers under this proposal are going to be asked to pay more, yet they're going to get less. I've already mentioned one of the consequences that can happen as a

result of this. You could end up having workers leave to the private sector instead of staying in the public sector.

You could have employees opt out. That's the other part of the plan. You can get a run on the plan because there are a number of employees that can choose to opt out of the plan because they're part-timers. You can also get employers that choose to opt out. If you get provisions of a plan that an employer can no longer sell, they start looking at ways in which they might be able to start their own plan. Look at AHS as a prime example: 100,000 employees, the largest employer in Alberta. They certainly don't need to be within a public plan. They certainly could develop their own plan, and then you put the entire plan at risk.

8:50

The last reason why I oppose this bill as a conservative: the Auditor General has been giving some fantastic quotes lately, Mr. Speaker. Let me read to you another quote that he most recently gave on the issue of the pension plans. This was from his February 2014 report on page 43. He talks about the potential for these changes to cause workers and employers to start heading for the exits, and this is what he says.

Practically speaking, current and future employees will not likely pay for benefits accruing to past employees if current employees' contribution rates are significantly more than the value of their own expected pension benefits. If current and future employees will not support the plan, then the options are limited to [the following]: the employer is left to assume more of the past liability; retired employees will receive benefits that are less than promised; or the plan risks insolvency.

So if you're creating through legislation the danger that you're going to see a run on the plan, which is forcing its insolvency, then what that means is that taxpayers may end up having to shoulder a greater portion of the unfunded liability because there will not be as many workers in the plan to be able to get it to solvency.

I would say that although there might be some great progressive reasons to oppose this bill, there are also some great conservative reasons to oppose this bill. I think the government is going absolutely in the wrong direction on this, which is why I support the motion to refer this to committee. Let's wait until the freedom of information requests come back, let's wait until we get the actuarial studies in June, and let's make sure that we're not trying to solve a problem that is already going to solve itself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. leader.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Fawcett: I'm just wondering if I can ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition if one of the reasons she wants this particular bill to go to committee is so that she can explain what her party is proposing as far as making any changes to pensions and why that position has possibly changed and why their new position might possibly, actually, leave a very good chance of a significant amount of liability to future taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, when she talked about not supporting this bill on conservative principles – we just saw a few minutes ago the hon. leader stand up and not support the budget. One of the main reasons she talked about was not leaving future liabilities to taxpayers. So does she want to go to committee so that she can explain to Albertans why it might not be appropriate to leave financial liabilities for taxpayers in building infrastructure but it's quite all right to leave future financial liabilities to taxpayers by cutting off the defined benefit plan and making all new employees go to a defined contribution plan in the public sector?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to answer that question. One of the differences between our party and how we operate and the way that the governing party operates is that we actually have member-passed policy. So when we put forward ideas, they come forward to our policy convention, and then they get voted up or down. When we get policies voted down, we accept the will of our members.

In point of fact, we had voted on the idea of moving to a defined contribution plan. But I can tell you what our members told us at the AGM. When this policy came forward, the speakers at the mike said that a well-run defined benefit plan can be solvent and can actually be more cost-effective than a defined contribution plan. So they voted it down. Because we are a party that values the grassroots opinion of our members, we accepted that view.

What does a well-run defined benefit plan look like? Well, I can tell you what you could do if you're making any changes. You would follow what other plans have done in both the private sector and the public sector. When you make changes, number one, you negotiate them, which is something that the Auditor General has also acknowledged should be done. Secondly, if you're going to make significant changes, you make them apply to future hires so that when somebody comes in, they know what the rules are rather than unilaterally trying to retroactively change the rules after you've already got somebody in the plan.

I also reject the premise of the associate minister's point, just assuming or declaring that these plans have an unfunded liability that won't be resolved. He obviously didn't listen to any of the points that I raised on behalf of not only the AAMD and C and AUMA and the five different unions that signed the letter to me but also on behalf of his own international and intergovernmental affairs minister, who has acknowledged that because there is a dedicated portion of the premiums that our employers and employees pay, it will go to pay that unfunded liability down. Indeed, last year alone the unfunded liability was reduced by \$1 billion.

What we're asking for is for the government to wait until the June actuarial studies come out for both of these plans so that we can actually all be on the same page with the same information in determining what the solvency of the plans actually are.

Right now I'm afraid that the government has absolutely zero credibility in trying to light their hair on fire, claiming that there is a problem when we have the evidence of employers like the AUMA, AAMD and C, and the five main unions with actuarial studies which prove the exact opposite. I'm just not prepared to support a piece of legislation on the government's word. I'm afraid that their word has not demonstrated to have much value over the last couple of years of governance. I think that we need to wait until we have good information before we can make that decision. This is why it needs to go to committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, I'm wondering if the leader could comment on how she feels the PC leadership race may influence the outcome of this bill.

Ms Smith: I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm sure the potential candidates for future Premier are probably watching this debate with great interest because the fact of the matter is that the government has 300,000 individuals who are impacted by this

plan: 150,000 existing workers in the LAPP plan and 50,000 existing retirees . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. leader.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the leader for the Liberal opposition.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and speak to . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor, hon. member.

Please proceed.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to the amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I actually quite endorse the recommendation. Again, to follow in the vein of why a conservative, a fiscal conservative in particular, is speaking in support of continued dialogue on this bill, I'd like to elaborate.

In the constituency where I live, in Calgary-Varsity, this issue is one that has really resonated. It's something that we've been talking about for months. Since the Finance minister introduced this change, our office, like many, has received well over 100 very personalized letters. We've had people walk in the door. We've had calls. We've had people just drop by to offer an opinion. This issue really matters to constituents, and it really matters to me. I just want to talk through that a little bit.

Pension reform is important, and I think we all understand the financial reasons for the changes. In 2012 I was very happy to put my name on a bill to amend private-sector pension funds to give more choices to employees and employers and to align Alberta's legislation with the pension legislation of other Canadian provinces. It was thoughtful.

I was and I am fully supportive of a government that's unafraid to make the difficult decisions needed today to ensure long-term prosperity for our children. I heard that from the Member for Calgary-Klein, and I agree with it. These decisions that we make every day have to have fiscal discipline and rigorous scrutiny to ensure that Albertans get value for every dollar spent. This is what it means to me to be a fiscal conservative.

I welcome this government's desire to ensure that private- and public-sector pensions are sustainable and affordable. Like many in this House, I have studied actuarial tables and expert reports to more fully understand the implications of the choices we're making here today as legislators. I've done this to try to figure out for myself and my constituents what the critical questions are. We've heard lots of them. Will the pensions self-correct if we just give them time to recover from the 2008 crisis?

9:00

I've come to the conclusion that the current system does need changing if it's to be adaptive to recent and future fiscal realities. More important than all of that, this legislation is not just about policies and forecasts and actuarial statements; it's about people, my constituents and every one of yours. For my part, I've sat down with dozens and dozens of constituents working through their own pension realities, trying to understand their situations and the implications of the bill on their own lives and their own futures. In many cases this has been a very successful approach. Getting to the facts of an individual pension situation and going through the implications has been helpful. Even when there were material implications, they can understand that.

But what was very alarming to me was the high level of fear that people brought to this process. As an MLA I can't help but

reflect that many people, way too many people, are genuinely afraid about their own family's ability to sustain fiscal security postretirement because they don't understand the implications of these proposed changes. I have seen this kind of fear before. Many, many decades ago I was an employee in a large energy company when the company decided to make the shift from defined benefit to defined contribution pension plans. As a lawyer I was brought in to help people understand those choices. Even though a lot of time has passed since then, I can still remember fully that anxiety and in some cases fear that co-workers felt about the process and its outcomes, especially those who were closer to retirement than I was.

What I also remember about that time is how our employer, a big oil company, was patient and understanding as it made the effort to ensure that each employee and our families understood the individual choices and the implications. While it took a long time – it took nearly two years – eventually we got to a place where a majority of employees felt comfortable and secure in those choices, and this was a very, very large company.

I have to say that the constituents I've spoken to on this matter have not generally felt that level of patience and concern from their employer, whether it's the province or another public body. They feel that they have not been involved in a process that informs them as to why the changes are necessary and how those changes might impact their situations, not just their financial situations but their emotional ones as well. These people I have spoken to on this issue understand the need for personal responsibility. They're not asking for a nanny state, but they are asking for better information and input on decisions that affect them.

This government, like other governments, has legislative options in dealing with its employees that are not available to other large private-sector employers in Canada. This government does have the power to enact Bill 9 and to make changes regarding public-sector pensions, but that power must respect the people whose lives will be impacted. Pensions provide emotional and fiscal security to people. If changes are to be made, we need to spend more time educating the public on pensions, as daunting as that task may be, and ensuring that individual employees have access to the information they need to appreciate the implications of their choices and the proposed legislative changes.

I know that members of this government are genuinely committed to giving all interested Albertans a voice in decision-making and policy development, but I think there is much work still to be done on this particular issue. That leaves me as the MLA for Calgary-Varsity in a very difficult position. On the one hand, as somebody who has studied the issue, who is a fiscal conservative, I strongly support pension reform that ensures sustainability of pensions over the long term. This legislation has those elements and calls for my support.

But I can't forget the fear I've heard in the voices and seen on the faces of my constituents. This fear, like most fear, comes from a lack of understanding or knowledge. Before proceeding, the government must try harder to address the critical need for better public understanding of pension reform and better employee understanding of the implications of change. This is not just about ideology or some kind of a power struggle between the government and the public-sector unions. It's a law that would affect individuals, and we all need to figure out a better way to reach out to these employees and engage them more fully in these critical discussions.

In short, it's too soon for the government to bring its legislative hammer down on this debate by enacting reform now without better understanding from employee partners. I cannot support this

legislation at this time. Rather, I would encourage the government to pause, as has been suggested, and work with its partners, the public-sector unions to explore better ways to support public and employee understanding of pension reform options and implications. I'd also ask for the inclusion of accounting, actuarial, and other respected professions in this task. Reading actuarial tables is dry, but we all can do a better job of making individual employees have a better understanding of the implications of their choices and of these proposed legislative changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals I stand opposed to Bill 9 and in support of the motion put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I'd like to thank the conservatives to the right of me here in the Wildrose for opposing this bill. They've got good conservative reasons for doing it. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, who has put forward many very reasonable arguments and conservative reasons for opposing this bill, and I would like to thank the NDP here on our left for the socialist reasons for opposing the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give fiscally and socially responsible reasons and, really, reasons of human dignity and human respect for why we should oppose this bill and intellectual arguments for why this bill is unnecessary. First of all, I'd like to take a look at the argument. This argument came forward because the Minister of Finance read a book, this book called *The Third Rail*, and he had a nightmare, and he got scared, and he panicked. So this government unilaterally, because he read a bedtime story, told us that the pension plan is unsustainable.

Well, let's talk about this. Their own Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has said that the pension plan is sustainable and in 12 years it will be fully funded. Why do we have this unfunded liability issue? Well, the majority of the reason is because the cowboys on Wall Street did a horrible job of the markets. In fact, the union leaders have suggested that this could be paid down in nine years.

How is this unfunded liability being paid down? Well, it's being paid down by the employees, the very employees who did not cause this stock market crash. They have elected to pay more money, and they've elected at a time of inflation and growth in Alberta – it's extraordinarily expensive to live here – to forgo wage increases in lieu. You know, they understand the issues of the government and the employer. In lieu of the government increasing their contribution, essentially the employees are almost funding both sides of the argument here, both sides of the unfunded liability. So from \$7.5 billion it's been paid down to \$6.4 billion and, hey, as was mentioned, if Leo de Bever keeps doing the wonderful job he is at AIMCo, it may be paid off many years fewer than 12 years or even nine years. So that argument holds no water of sustainability.

Then there's the issue of longevity. People are living longer. Well, the mortality tables in Canada were originally based on U.S. mortality tables, so that's already factored in. However, Canadians live longer. You know, we're a little bit healthier. There is a little adjustment to be made on that, but not to the point where it's getting to be unsustainable. So it's a minor adjustment, I believe in the area of – my understanding is it's 1 or 2 per cent. And after

this unfunded liability is paid off in five, nine, 12 years, the contribution rates for the employees and the employers will drop.

9:10

I'd like to talk about the other issue. The hon. Premier said that, hey, we're going to have fewer workers and more people collecting, so that's going to be unsustainable. We have three workers for every person who collects. Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no foundation for that. In Alberta the province is growing. We're up to 4 million people. It's a younger province. There are many young people from across the country and across the world moving here. When there are so many citizens in Alberta, so many residents, there's a need for more public services. You're going to need more teachers, more nurses, more doctors, more staff, more people to clean and run the hospitals and the schools and the public buildings and the buildings in which we work. You're going to need more roads to be built and maintained. The more people you have, the more public services we're going to have to deliver.

Now, they're going to say that it's talking about more government. Well, it's not about more government. That's just a foolish argument. You know, if you've got a hundred people, well, you need public services for a hundred. You've got 200 people; you're going to need services for 200. That has nothing to do with more government. The front-line staff aren't about more government. The front-line staff are about more front-line services. There will be a requirement – in fact, we are already so short of front-line workers in the areas of education and health care and social services and community supports for the population we currently have. If the government had the wisdom to actually hire the number of front-line workers that we need, we wouldn't be in chaos and crisis in many of the areas of essential public services. That assertion that, oh, we're going to have more collectees than workers: you know what? That may be true in Quebec, but it's not true in Alberta. You cannot generalize what's happening in Quebec or Ontario to Alberta. That argument holds no water whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that was raised is that these pensions pay 12,000 bucks a year, 15 grand a year. That's chump change in Alberta. We're talking \$1,000 to \$1,250 a month. What does that get you in this province when your bills are \$400 or \$500 a month? Have you seen your power and gas bills lately? Well, have you checked the price of gas at the pump? I don't know if these guys have bought groceries lately. They might be getting free meals all the time on the taxpayers' dime, but for the regular Albertan the cost of food, cost of clothing, cost of housing is immense. So \$1,000 to \$1,250 a month is poverty level.

Oh, yeah, Mr. Speaker. I forgot to talk about the cost of medications. Do you know how much medication costs these days? For seniors to be getting \$1,000 to \$1,250 a month – well, I'll tell you one thing, hon. members on that side. We might fix them up in the medical system, but if they can't afford their drugs – guess what? – they're coming back to the hospital again.

So what I'm alluding to here is poverty, Mr. Speaker. In the wealthiest place in the country, if not the planet: poverty. We already have 90,000 children living in poverty. Well, I don't know if these guys on the conservative side understand that poor children have poor moms and dads. Okay? Poor kids don't have rich parents. Now you're going to turn their grandparents into poor grandparents. So you're going to have three generations all living in poverty.

Well, here are the effects of poverty. The reality is that in the Capital health region, according to a study done years ago, poor men die seven years before rich men. And before you die, there is

a ton of human suffering that happens. Many visits to the health system happen, many medications that need to be had.

The effects of poverty. I was at the food bank earlier today, and some members from the conservative government were there. Well, we have a lot of people in our province, in this city right here, in the capital city, who go to the food bank because of food insecurity.

The effects of hunger on the human body and the human condition. Mr. Speaker, I was born in the developing world, in a third-world country. I can't believe that these conditions exist in the wealthiest place on the planet. This policy will only exacerbate these conditions.

I'll tell you one thing, hon. members on that side. You think that you might be saving a few bucks over here, but get ready to pay more for homelessness, poverty, addictions, mental health, and the health care system over here. Way more on this side. That's what unsustainable, the costs of health care because people are sick, and many of them are sick because they're poor. Seniors in poverty are at even higher risk than younger people in poverty because their health conditions can be much worse. So if you think you've got problems in health care today, you just wait. Pass this policy. You just wait. We will be busier than ever in the emergency departments.

I want to talk about the morale, the dignity of the very people that built this province, the 24-hour health responders, the police officers, the firefighters, the paramedics, the front-line staff in the hospitals, those teachers, and those heroes who help all our public buildings run. They do every job there is. These are not the highest paid folks amongst us in our society. The morale of the health care workers, you know, is at about 52 per cent already demoralized. The morale of the public service, the civil service, is at 47 per cent because of actions like bills 45 and 46 and because of the fact that they're doing more work for more people with less resources and less pay and no respect. They're already taking home way less because of the cowboys on Wall Street. They're paying off their own unfunded liability and taking no pay raise at a time of inflation.

This will only seek to demoralize the workforce even more, the civil workforce and the front-line workforce, that's going to actually look after all of you when you get sick or when your family gets sick – and I hope they don't – and educate your children and grandchildren. When you demoralize front-line staff, as any businessman will tell you – you know what? – that's bad for business. People become less productive. When morale is low, your stress levels are high, your cortisol levels are high, your injury rates are higher, and your sickness rates are higher. When that happens – guess what? – then your overtime costs are going to go up. This is only going to seek to demoralize even further a front-line workforce that's already demoralized. Whether you're a Liberal, a Conservative, or a New Democrat, this is just common sense here, my dear friends.

Mr. Speaker, when people retire – you know, women are wiser than we men are, and women live longer than men in our society. Guess what? This is going to affect the widows. You're going to have a lot of women who are widows, who are going to have to deal with this. I know; I lost my father three years ago. My mother is a 75-year-old widow, and she's healthy. Dad worked in the mill. He was a union guy. He worked at Weldwood in Squamish. He didn't earn much. You know, he could have started a business, but he decided to take a lower wage in lieu of benefits for his family. He thought he'd have a little pension, he'd work hard for less money, and he and his wife would be looked after, and if he passed away, his wife would be looked after. They made sure that

all the kids in the family got an education, so we did okay, and we made sure that mom and dad were okay.

But, I'll tell you, in many families you've got a lot of seniors whose children are somewhere else in the world or whose children aren't doing well themselves. Our widows are already living in poverty, and we're only going to exacerbate this even more. This is an attack on the women in our society.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, talking about women, women don't earn what men earn in our society. They don't earn what men earn, and this is going to hurt mothers and women and grandmothers. I ask those members on that side – you've got the majority of the votes. You can pass this bill – no problem – but I urge you to listen to these arguments.

Mr. Speaker, then there's the issue of the cost of living. The Premier said that I don't know what I'm talking about and that I should read the material again. Well, I read his answer. He said: "The major change with respect to cost of living is going from a defined cost-of-living adjustment process to a targeted one, one that's based on return on investment." So he's going to make the pension dependent upon the same cowboys on Wall Street who caused the problem to begin with.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, this is nothing more than a Republican-style attack on the very people that build this province and country each and every day as well as the cities and all of our municipalities, who run our universities, run our schools, run our hospitals, and run our democratic institutions. That's all this is.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about mandate. The former Premier who recently resigned did not run on this issue. It affects directly 300,000 people. They've got family members, so that's about 600,000 people, family members, that vote. Well, maybe they have more family members. They also have children and grandchildren. This government did not run on this during the election. The current Premier wasn't democratically elected as Premier by the people of the province. They're going to have another leader coming in September. We say: put this aside; let's run on this next election.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, I was eager to hear just the end of what the hon. leader has to say about this important amendment that's been proposed.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you very much, hon. member. As I said, let's put this issue off till the election. I challenge the governing party to show some real courage. I propose that this be an election issue.

Mr. Speaker, the pension plans are sustainable. We should be hiring more front-line workers, delivering more public services for the increasing number of Albertans. In fact, the ratio of front-line workers probably should be 4 to 1 or 5 to 1 for the amount of people that live here. We need to hire more front-line staff. We're a younger province. These pension changes are unnecessary.

Mr. Speaker, then there's the last thing. Here's why I think this government is doing this. One, it's absolute power. Absolute power corrupts. After 43 years they actually believe that they can do anything they want and get away with it. They think Albertans aren't watching because, you know, this is the mid-election cycle. It's two years away. This government has collectively managed to

cheese off everybody in society. Everybody. There's nobody that's happy with them right now. But, I'll tell you, hon. members on that side, you are messing with the seniors and the pensioners and the baby boomers and their spouses and their children. If you are arrogant enough to think that you're going to win this next election, I strongly urge most of you in the backbenches to vote against your interim Premier and your cabinet. You backbenchers are the moral authority of that government, that caucus, if conservative, social, moral, and intellectual arguments aren't enough to convince you.

One good thing, Mr. Speaker, is that when this government drops – not if, when – I'm pleased to see that all the good parties on this side, from the New Democrats to the Liberals to the Wildrose and the hon. independent Member for Calgary-Varsity – after the next election will all reverse whatever decision they make.

Mr. Speaker, oh, gosh. You know, I think I probably made too many arguments for that side to handle. If the Finance minister were to read these arguments, he might have another nightmare.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should all as members strive to build a strong economy and a strong society that puts the very people who build this province at the forefront, that shows them the respect and dignity that they deserve. If we do that, I believe we can all build a much better province together. It's all about dignity and respect and doing the right thing in the wealthiest place in the world. I'll tell you, the main question in the next election is actually about inequality, fairness, justice, and dignity. This bill proposes to increase inequality, increase unfairness, and is going to increase the fact that many people can't even afford justice anymore. They've even cut legal aid.

That's what this bill is about. It's about inequality, and inequality, we all know – even the Conservatives here know – is actually going to cost you more money down the road. It's going to cost you more money down the road, and the major increases in spending in this country, in this province are health care and social services. Health care and social services and homelessness and the effects of poverty and addictions. Not only is it going to cost more money; it's actually just going to increase human suffering. It's going to increase human suffering, and when you spend over there, you're going to cut even more your kids' education and teachers and the support that our communities need to build a strong, thriving province.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak to this very important topic.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to this most excellent amendment that has been made to Bill 9 by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Before I begin, I just want to reference the call we just heard from the leader of the Liberal Party for an immediate election to be fought on this question. Perhaps the only party less prepared than the Progressive Conservatives for an election right now might be the Liberal Party. I would suggest to the hon. leader that he may want to reregister his 52 constituency associations and get his fundraising into six digits before he faces the next election.

Mr. Speaker, this is a motion to refer Bill 9 to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. I think that's very appropriate because this is, in fact, a question of hundreds of thousands of Albertans' economic future. It's important for them

and their families and for their own piece of mind, but it's also a significant impact on the economy. If future retirees don't have the money to live comfortably and with dignity, it not only affects them; it affects the rest of the economy through reduced spending but also increased costs for health care, public housing, and that sort of thing. So I think it's very appropriate.

I think the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition made some good points in her comments with regard to reasons why we might want to have more discussion, potentially even some public hearings at the committee level, before we proceed with second reading of this bill. That would allow us to listen to Albertans and listen to people who are currently in the pension and people who have paid into it and may be receiving benefits or are expecting to about their situation. We could ask questions of the government with regard to the actuarial studies that they've conducted. We could talk to the people who serve on the pension boards who have opposed this particular piece of legislation and draw upon their expertise in making a decision that, I think, would serve well all Albertans, not just public employees.

I think that the government has to answer some questions. They haven't been adequately answered in the debate here today, I'm afraid to say, and I regret that. One of the biggest questions that I have, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Finance with regard to his claim that this is about taking action to protect pensions and to make sure they're viable in the future. You know, in order to make sure that a pension plan is viable, you need to make sure that there are enough people paying enough money in contributions because they're employed in order to meet the obligations to those people who have retired and are receiving the benefits. So we need to take a close look at that question.

9:30

You can deal with it in one of two ways, Mr. Speaker, or maybe one of three ways. If there are more people employed, then there are more contributions. If there are fewer people employed but you raise the contribution rates for the employees and for the employer, then you can increase the revenue to meet your obligations. Or, if necessary, you could reduce the benefits that are received to bring the plan into balance that way. Those are all options. I'm not suggesting that we do the latter. Those are things that support the argument of the Finance minister that they want to protect the viability of the pension. If we take it as a given that he's saying that we need to take that action – and I don't agree with him – then one of those three things or some combination of those three things would be necessary.

The interesting thing about this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that it has a couple of provisions that run counter to the Finance minister's claim that he wants to protect these pensions. The first one is the cap on contributions because that limits the ability of the pension boards to bring the plans back into balance and, as a result, limits their ability to make sure that the pensions are sustainable and viable in the long run. That's contrary to the minister's claim that what he's really doing is trying to protect people's pensions. That's number one.

The second one contained also in this bill, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the government passing legislation to protect itself from liability. The government will no longer be liable for anyone's losses in the plan as a result of changes that are being brought about. So the government protects itself from being liable for any losses people receive as a result of lower pensions because of the impact of this legislation. More significant, perhaps, is that the government is protecting itself from liability in case the plans fail and is limiting the liability for the remaining assets of the pension fund itself. So they are taking themselves and the public,

therefore, off the hook should these plans fail. Now, that also speaks to the minister's assertion that he wants to protect the plans because what he's really doing is that if push comes to shove, he's going to throw the plans and pensioners under the bus. That's what he's saying.

So I think there are some real contradictions in what the Minister of Finance is saying about the intention of this bill. I think that, in fact, we should have an opportunity in the committee to grill the minister about these contradictions, and I think he needs to provide us with some really clear and rational explanation for this apparently contradictory direction that's contained in the plan.

There are some other things, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we know that an increasing number of Canadians, including Albertans, don't have adequate retirement finances and that more and more Canadians will retire into poverty. The solution that's been advanced across Canada and supported by nine of 10 provinces was a major overhaul and improvement in the Canada pension plan. That, I think, would have been a very significant and timely step to take. Unfortunately, under a previous Minister of Finance it was the province of Alberta that blocked direction in this way. It was led by several other provinces, but Alberta opposed that direction. Ultimately, the former Minister of Finance federally, who recently passed away, finally put an end to the discussions with respect to improving the Canada pension plan.

Now, that's not directly related to the bill, Mr. Speaker. It's a related issue, but it is something that I think bears some exploration by the committee as well. I think, going beyond just this bill, that this Legislature ought to have a more comprehensive discussion about the retirement situation of Albertans. These public pension plans cover a very significant number of Albertans: 250,000 people, a very significant chunk. But many Albertans have no pension protection at all. Certainly, the companion bill to Bill 9, which is Bill 10, gives the government the authority to assist private employers and public pension plans not covered by Bill 9 to convert from a defined benefit plan to a targeted benefit plan. There are many questions that need to be asked about that.

I would actually support not only this motion to refer Bill 9 but would really like to see a similar motion with respect to Bill 10 because it has actually received very little public attention, Mr. Speaker. The government, in terms of Bill 9 and the public pension plans, did do a briefing for the unions representing the workers covered under these plans, and they took the initiative to make a major public campaign. So the public is generally aware of the contents of Bill 9, and there has been some healthy public debate with regard to that.

But with respect to Bill 10, which may potentially affect hundreds of thousands of other Albertans' pension rights, there has been almost no discussion, no coverage. When we debated it last night in second reading, we went until after 1 o'clock in the morning. Who's listening then? You know, the media has gone home. There might be a few people who can't get a hockey game or something on TV and manage to tune in to us for a brief period of time and may have seen some of it. But generally that discussion, that debate, took place in a vacuum. Again, I think Bill 10 is a related issue, and I would really like to see it also considered in the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

I do really think that what we need to emphasize here is that very small changes in these plans can have very big effects on individuals. These changes can trigger bigger changes within the plans themselves that may be unanticipated. I think that's one of the things that we also need to explore. If people have to work – and I've been talking to different groups of public employees, as has my caucus, over the past several weeks. Just yesterday I went

to speak to my old union, my own union, the Amalgamated Transit Union local 569, which represents the city of Edmonton transit employees. One of the people, after we'd had a bit of a discussion about the changes, said: "You know what? I really just feel like I would like to get the hell out of this pension plan and figure out something else to do." Now, she doesn't have that authority. She can't do that. But I do feel that there is a real risk that when we present people with a fait accompli, where they don't really have any say, and we tell them that they have to work longer and they will get a reduced pension, then I think there's a great deal of frustration. At some point there may be a real run on the plan. The way people are talking about it is to head for the doors before the changes to the plan take effect, to get out before those changes take effect. I think that that's something we need to take into account.

9:40

Aside from that, Mr. Speaker, we know that more and more seniors are retiring into poverty, and very slight changes in the plan – for example, reducing the COLA, increasing the penalties for early retirement, and reducing the capacity of the boards to adjust contribution levels – may actually have a result quite the opposite of what the minister is claiming. I think this is true in a very real way.

This bill converts the public-sector pension plans from defined benefit plans into targeted benefit plans because there is a limitation on the capacity of the boards to manage difficulty, to manage difficult economic circumstances. They may have no choice sometime down the road but to actually reduce the benefits that are paid. That is in every sense of the word a targeted benefit plan. So that's also something that I think the minister has not been particularly straightforward with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The Associate Minister of Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to stand and speak to this issue tonight, but listening to the hon. member across just kind of piqued me a little bit that I should stand up and maybe just say a few things that are on my mind.

Mr. Speaker, I support our public sector, and I support the fact that they have pensions. It's great that they do because 80 per cent of Albertans don't have a pension. Eighty per cent of Albertans and probably 80 per cent of Canadians don't have a pension to rely on, so when the markets go up and down or when the interest rates go up and down, they adjust their lifestyle and just try to get by the best that they can because that's what they have. [interjections] I'm hoping the member across would be willing to listen because I listened quietly to him.

We have a lot of people in the province that don't have a pension plan, and they work and get by. We've heard that maybe sometime in the future, maybe if things go terribly wrong, there may be a small reduction in a pension or they may have to change some of the increases to a smaller amount.

But I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, the thing that really piqued me was when the member opposite said that the government is protecting itself from liability. The government is only a representative of the taxpayers of this province. We're not protecting ourselves. I have nothing to protect myself from. We have 4 million people out there, most of whom don't have pensions, that are going to be picking up all of the liability for all

of these pensions if anything changes, and this seems to be just okay with people across the floor. I'm surprised by one group across the floor, that they're so quickly willing to throw the taxpayers of this province under the bus.

So you can talk about some pensioned people who might see a small reduction at some time. I'm talking about 4 million people that don't have pensions that all of you want to throw under the bus, and I'm a little disturbed by that. I want to ask the member: how can you so quickly and so easily throw the taxpayers under the bus to try to protect something? We want to make sure people pay their fair share and get a pension for it. You seem to want to have the taxpayers pick up anything and all that's left over. You want to willy-nilly have them pay whatever has to be. Don't forget that as an employer in this plan the government will still have an equal liability with the employees in that plan. We'll still have a responsibility to work with them to make sure that that pension is there, but we aren't throwing the entire population, every taxpayer in this province, under the bus. Can you tell me why you're willing to throw them under the bus?

Mr. Mason: I'm absolutely not advocating throwing the taxpayers under the bus. What I am saying is that the government is laying the groundwork for a potential failure of this plan, and they know it, so they want to make sure that they have no liabilities at all with respect to this plan. That's what I'm saying. What I'm saying, really, is that the government is not protecting the pensions of its own employees. It's reducing their pensions, it's reducing the COLA amount, and it's going to reduce the ability of the pension boards to manage the plans and to keep them out of trouble. Ultimately, it's going to convert these plans from a defined benefit to a targeted benefit plan, and that's the government's objective.

The government also has not talked about the other piece that I think we need to talk about, and that is: what are they planning to do with the level of government employment in this province? Are they planning to privatize more of the government services and reduce the number of people that are available to support this plan, and is that one of the reasons why this legislation is here? I think, Mr. Speaker, that's a question that needs to be asked because we know that this government tries to privatize things wherever it can.

It's privatizing all of the lab services in the Edmonton area right now despite promising to protect public health care in the province. We know that it has downloaded most of the social services onto private and not-for-profit agencies. We know that the former Premier ran on that in her platform because we actually downloaded her website, and we know what she promised, and we know what the Conservative Party promised to do the last election, and that was part and parcel of their campaign promises.

I think there are a lot of issues that need to be explored, and that's one of the points that I wanted to make, not that I think that the taxpayers should be thrown under the bus or be on the hook for whatever goes wrong but that the government is increasing their chances that something will go wrong, and one of the things that it's doing is to protect itself in case this plan fails altogether, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There are three seconds left. By the time you get up, hon. member, the time will already have expired, and it has.

I'll recognize the Member for Airdrie, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I am happy to continue to express my opposition and the Wildrose opposition to Bill 9 and certainly support this motion by the NDP opposition with regard to referring this to committee.

Mr. Speaker, let us not lose sight of who this affects. We're not talking about rich executives in office towers, people making \$300,000, \$400,000, \$500,000 a year with huge severance packages. That's not who we're talking about here. We're talking about front-line workers. We're talking about police officers. We're talking about sheriffs and guards. We're talking about nurses. We're talking about social workers and janitors cleaning the crud off hospital floors.

That's the type of people that we're talking about here, civil servants, front-line workers that are not making huge amounts of money. They're making \$60,000, \$50,000, \$40,000, \$70,000 a year. Probably both people in the family, if it's a couple, are working, working hard for their kids, trying to put them through university, trying to pay the mortgage on the house, going on a small, one- or two-week vacation every year to somewhere decent. These are the type of people we're talking about here. We're not talking about high rollers, as we've seen in the executive offices of AHS and, of course, in the Premier's office and other places in this government. That's not who we're talking about here.

We're talking about pensioners and people who are about to take in pensions who are making pensions of roughly \$1,200, \$1,400 a month. Could you survive on \$1,200 or \$1,400 a month, Mr. Speaker? I know that I'd sure have trouble with that. Now, of course, clearly they know that they've paid into CPP. [interjection] Okay. Someone over there says: oh, they have their CPP. So they're making \$2,200 a month. Could we all survive on \$2,200 a month? Is that a lot of money? I don't think so. Twenty-two hundred dollars a month pays my mortgage, electricity, gas, and maybe a couple hundred bucks of groceries for my kids' never-ending appetite. This is not a lot of money we're talking about here.

Now, I want to be very clear who this is affecting. It's not just affecting those workers. It's affecting their spouses. It's affecting their kids. It's affecting their extended families to certain degrees. A lot of these folks take care of their grandmothers or their parents and their grandparents, and when money gets tight, they can't take care of them as well anymore. This affects a lot of people. I would say that by some estimates you're talking about 500,000 voters, certainly 200,000 to 300,000 voters. You're certainly talking about that.

9:50

You know, it just amazes me that this PC Party, this PC government, would be so ill-informed and arrogant that they would make these changes in spite of all the people that this is going to affect and not think that there are going to be massive ramifications for those people that are injured, and frankly it will have massive political ramifications. I've heard it said by members over there: "Well, we want to get this passed real quick. We want to get this passed real, real quick because we don't want to put this in the next leader's lap." You don't think this is going to be in the next leader's lap? You think people are going to have collective amnesia in Alberta? All 4 million people are just going to all of a sudden forget about this type of reckless governance? They're not, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I want to be absolutely clear about the Wildrose position on this. We released a statement, of course, on April 17, when we learned about Bill 9. It says as follows. This is the following statement on the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act,

which threatens existing public pension benefits for hard-working Albertans across the province.

As usual, the PC government's standard operating procedure on labour relations issues is that of bullying instead of [conducting] good faith negotiations.

Wildrose has long supported the view that contracts and agreements must be respected. That includes the pension arrangements promised to current public sector workers and pensioners who chose their careers in the public sector based, at least in part, on the promise of the current public pension arrangement.

Although we feel some reforms to the current system may be needed to ensure the long term sustainability of public pensions, we believe that any such changes need to be negotiated openly and respectfully with union leadership, and that any substantial changes should only be applied to workers who have yet to be hired, rather than those already employed or retired.

Wildrose is committed to repealing Bill 9 if elected in 2016, along with Bills 45 and 46 which also unjustly ignore the legal rights of our public-sector employees.

[interjection] I know the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is upset about this whole situation, and I know that people in his riding who take their pensions are going to be real happy with his support of this bill. I'm sorry you feel a little bit sore about that. You know, it's sad. It's going to cost you a lot of votes, a lot of support, a lot of embarrassing moments for you for sure, but that's no reason to heckle in this House. You should just sit and listen and learn something.

Now, there are several principles that Wildrose believes in with regard to public pension changes if there are going to be changes. First of all, any changes absolutely must be negotiated in good faith. You cannot poison the well with our public-sector workers by acting like bullies. Bill 45, Bill 46, Bill 9: all these bills have one thing in common. The government couldn't get the job done at the negotiating table. They failed. They failed, failed, failed.

Because they failed, instead of doing what's right and getting back to the negotiating table or going to an arbitrator or a mediator, et cetera, instead of doing that, they said: "No. We're just going to use the hammer that we have as the majority government here. Despite what we said in the election to these public-sector workers and all the promises we made of being reasonable, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, despite all that, we're just going to bring the hammer, and we're going to get our way no matter what." That's what they said. They said: "We're not going to negotiate. We don't have to negotiate. We're the government. People will vote for us no matter what we do." That's the attitude. So they pass these things, and they bring these things forward without proper consultation, without any proper negotiation with our public-sector unions.

We believe very strongly that any changes to public-sector pensions need to be negotiated in good faith with the people that are affected, and that, of course, means union leadership. I don't care if you're from the left, the right, the middle, up, down. It doesn't matter. That's just integrity. That's just integrity, Mr. Speaker. It's governing with integrity in good faith. You don't have to agree with someone on the ideological spectrum to have a good-faith negotiation with them. You don't. You can have disagreements on things, and you can still sit down as friends at the negotiating table, as fellow Albertans that want to see good public services for the people of Alberta, and hammer out a deal that makes sense for all people involved, all stakeholders involved. This has not been done here.

The second point and the second principle is that any changes to the public pension plan, if they are negotiated, need to be

grandfathered. They need to be grandfathered in and only apply to future hires and not existing hires, and it's very simple, the reason why this should be so. When somebody signs up for a career in social work, nursing, policing, whatever, they do so, and they say: look, I'm going to take a little bit less up front as a public-sector worker than I could make if I went and worked in the oil and gas sector or in business, et cetera, et cetera. They say: I'm going to take a little less up front, and I'm going to do so because (a) I love public service and (b) I'm going to have a nice secure pension at the end. Not a huge pension, not some extravagant thing like we talked about with AHS and so forth, but a pension, something that they can count on for their retirement, and they can budget their investments, they can budget their lives and plan their lives according to that set of circumstances, those expectations.

So for example, you know, a police officer. Highly stressful, stressful job. Social worker. Highly stressful job. They may say: "Okay. I'm going to work real hard for this period of time, and then I'm going to take early retirement, two or three or four years early. I'm going to do that because I'm going to be very stressed out after doing this for 30 years or 35 years or whatever. So I'm going to take early retirement, and that's going to be part of my plan. So I'm going to invest a little bit more up front. I'm going to save my pennies, save my dollars a little bit more up front so that I can take that early retirement and that early pension."

For the government to come along and say, "No. Sorry; I know you've been planning that, but too bad. We're going to pull the rug out from underneath you, and you're just going to have to make do" is not governing with integrity. That is not fair, Mr. Speaker. You can't pull the rug out from not only our existing pensioners but, specifically with this bill, existing workers that are already paying into the plan, and that includes younger workers, ones that have only been on the job five, 10 years. They still made a decision based on, essentially, an employment contract with the government, and that employment contract included the pension arrangement that they have had promised to them. So you don't pull the rug out.

Also, we have to look at some of the examples where grandfathering has worked. In Saskatchewan, for example, we had the NDP government at the time, in 1977, Allan Blakeney's NDP government. They made some pension changes to the public-sector plan. I'm not saying that that's needed here, but in that case they switched from a defined benefit to a defined contribution. That was the switch that was made, but what they did was that they grandfathered it. They said: okay; for everybody who's already paid into the system, they get the defined benefits that they were promised, and we're starting this new system with new hires.

Now, I'm not saying that we need that to make sure we have sustainability in our current pension plan, but the point is, the principle is, that it was grandfathered because the NDP at that time in Saskatchewan respected the rights of the people who had already paid into the plan and respected the decisions that they made with regard to their career, and that is to be respected. You can agree or disagree whether defined benefit, defined contribution, or targeted, pooled pension plans, whatever it is. Any changes made after they're negotiated should only apply to new workers that have not been hired yet.

We also have to make sure that when we're negotiating these new pension plans, if there are negotiations in this regard, we still have them at a point where our pension arrangements will attract new workers. That's important. It is tough to find good workers in Alberta right now because it's so competitive. People are snatching up our university students and all kinds of folks right away into the oil and gas sector, business sector, ag, science sectors, you know,

biotech, and you just go on and on and on, environmental sciences. There are lots of great things going on in this province with regard to our workers. So it's extremely competitive. Have we made sure that this new pension arrangement is going to be able to still attract the people that we want into the public service? I don't know. The Auditor General says that that determination has not been studied. It was in his last recommendations that it be studied. I don't see any proof that it has been studied.

10:00

The fourth point is that we need to be very careful – and the Liberal leader noted this – to make sure that we don't try to save a couple of bucks here and then lose 20 bucks over there. When we cut people's pensions and when we cut what their retirement is going to be – you know what? – you don't want to retire people into poverty. You don't want to do that.

Now, I'm not saying that these changes are going to guarantee everyone is going to be retired into poverty. I'm not saying that. But, you know, when you're making \$1,200 a month in your pension or \$2,200 with CPP included, you're walking a fine line. Hopefully, there are other monies that you've saved. Maybe it's \$3,000, whatever, that you're making every month. Inflation is going up, gas bills are going up, electricity bills are going up, rent is going up, the costs for a lot of food are going up, everything is going up, and we shouldn't be looking at decreasing the size of the pensions of our workers, especially the workers we're talking about here, these front-line workers making very modest wages and modest pensions.

We don't want to retire people into poverty. That will have long-term costs – health costs, social costs, other costs – that far outweigh the costs of the money saved by making these changes to the public-sector pension plan.

How much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Nine seconds.

Mr. Anderson: Nine seconds. Well, I look forward to taking any questions in that regard, but we need to stop Bill 9 in its tracks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm a little confused and a little bit curious because the hon. Member for Airdrie talked about a process by which existing plan members would be grandfathered, but earlier I heard his leader stand up and say that that proposal had been shot down at a policy meeting of the Wildrose Party. So what is your position?

Mr. Anderson: A very good question. Well, what happens in our party is that sometimes members will come forward with propositions, and, you know, they'll make policy presentations at the AGMs that we have. We have a very grassroots process. We have about a thousand members come to these things.

Some Hon. Members: How many?

Mr. Anderson: Whoa. That woke people up. They're sensitive. They're at 15 per cent in the polls right now. It's tough. They're battling for fourth place. It's a tough competition, so they're a little sensitive on that stuff.

Anyway, what happened is that somebody brought up a proposal at the last AGM and said: "You know what? I think we should do what Saskatchewan did. I think we should move from a

defined benefit contribution plan in the public service to a defined contribution public plan." They gave their reasons for doing so. Well, they have that right. Everyone has that right.

What was the vote against that? The vote was about – I don't know – 80-20 against. It was overwhelmingly defeated. And guess what? It was defeated for the reasons I'm stating here. The fact of the matter is that, you know, we can be all ideological about what works, but one thing you learn in this job is that ideology is not all that it's cracked up to be. You have to do what makes sense, Mr. Speaker. You have to put ideology back there and just make decisions that are right for Albertans. I know the PCs don't understand that. For some reason they're so ideological: no matter what, they just hate unions. If you belong to a union, they won't listen to them. They say: "You belong to a union? You're a left-wing crazy." That's what they say, and they just won't listen.

Here in the Wildrose we have a much more moderate approach. We believe in listening to the cases of our union members and our front-line workers, taking their suggestions, and listening to them. Listening to them: that's the key. That's why we're not introducing Bill 45, Bill 46, and Bill 9. That's why we're not doing that. Instead of having an ideological solution to everything like our PC friends, we believe in common-sense solutions that actually serve the people of Alberta.

I know that the PC tactic and, to a lesser extent, the tactic of the NDP as well as the Libs is to try to paint other parties as extreme. They try to say: "Okay. You've got to put the Wildrose in this little box, the Liberals and the NDP, the socialists, over here, and we're the moderates." That's what the PC strategy has been for the last several years. But that's not how Albertans think, certainly not anymore. They want common-sense solutions. They want respect. They just want solutions to come forward that work for Albertans. An ideological hammer like Bill 9 is an ideological solution to a complex problem that is not going to help regular Albertans.

The Wildrose is not interested in that. I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in making good-faith negotiations with our public-sector workers and passing amendments and agreeing to contracts that are fair for our front-line workers and also, of course, fair for taxpayers. But that should be done in good faith at the negotiating table, not using some kind of bully pulpit to pass a piece of junk like Bill 9. That's what it is. [interjections] I know. Those are harsh words. Those are harsh words: piece of junk.

An Hon. Member: A piece of gum?

Mr. Anderson: A piece of gum. A piece of gum.

You know what? I have more to say about your question, hon. member. I think this member should be happy.

Mr. Mason: I'm ecstatic.

Mr. Anderson: When we first formed the Wildrose Party over here, this hon. member – he's been kind of like a sensei to me. He has been a sensei to me. He has taught me so much not only about House procedure but also about the struggle of every day, and I appreciate that very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I don't manage to hear every word that's said, but might I remind us all that we have some parliamentary traditions that we try to avoid certain words. I'll leave it at that.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure exactly how to move past that. I know that we hit a certain distillation

point of ideas and of rhetoric, and when I heard the hon. Member for Airdrie say that ideology is not all that it's cracked up to be, I think maybe we hit a high point for the evening.

I hate to move on after that, but certainly it's important for us to speak, I think, succinctly and critically on the motion to refer this particular bill. I think it's a great opportunity. We've heard so much already to the negative side of this pension issue that it's probably the most sensible thing to do. We've had independent members speaking out in favour of this amendment to refer. Opposition parties are united on that, too. So perhaps as a way by which we can defuse the tension that this pension is creating and will continue to create, all members should in fact support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's motion to refer this particular bill at this time.

It took me a while to absorb the totality of what's happening with both Bill 9 and Bill 10, but I'm starting to get a sense of it. You know, initially I was confused because I do have a personal respect for the Finance minister, and he was so emphatically saying: "No, no, no. None of these things are true. It's just not happening that way." Then I started to realize that it's the process that they are changing here, and it's the process by which further change can happen in the future. While the Finance minister might be a person of honour and respect and has the best of intentions – right? – if he's creating this bill by which all the decision-making capacity moves to Executive Council and to the ministry on the pensions of hundreds of thousands of public service workers here in the province of Alberta, well, you know, that's just not good politics, nor is it a practical solution moving forward because, of course, everybody changes. You come and you go in these positions.

10:10

While the Finance minister is making these promises that everything will be fine, well, you know, we don't know who might be in the position a few months from now, a few weeks from now. You just simply can't in good faith move past that idea that: oh, well, we promised in Executive Council, behind closed doors, by ministerial authority that we will maintain the integrity of these pensions for now and for the future.

Plus, you know, this is essentially a labour bill. It comes along in a stream of labour legislation and proposed legislation that we've seen over these last few months. Do you know what? I think that regular working people, not just public-sector workers but regular working people in general, have had enough of being kicked around by this government, and this just looks like another good, fat kick by the PC government to the pants of regular working people. It's not just in regard to wages, it's not just in regard to working conditions, but now this is the retirement security, the security for the future, that everybody works for in some modest way, not just to have that money there to live a life of luxury but to live modestly and to live in dignity in retirement.

Mr. Speaker, it's the process that's changing here. It's the process that I'm most concerned about, this idea that we're shifting almost all risk and liability in this plan to the workers while shifting most of the decision-making powers to the minister or to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. I mean, how can you in good faith make that choice, the idea that you lose, that you absolve the risk and that the risk goes to the workers and that all of the decision-making process goes to the government? I mean, that in itself is an imbalance that would suggest that it's only reasonable that we take this reference to just take two steps back on this legislation here at this time.

If this bill passes, the minister could unilaterally set maximum contribution rates and the ratio to be paid by employers and

employees through the plan and benefit reductions, including benefits accrued prior to January 1, 2016. All terms transitioning the plan from one plan to the other here are not in the best interests of the workers.

Also, this plan allows regulations to differentiate by employee class, thus opening the door to changing the 85 factor to a 90 factor or a 95 factor or whatever is decided by Executive Council or by the minister.

This bill reduces the liability

to the Crown, the Minister, an employer or any member of a Board . . . and no action or proceeding may be brought against such a person or entity, for any losses, costs or damages arising directly or indirectly in respect of that reduction of benefit or increase in contributions.

So the absolution of risk by the Crown, the increase in responsibility onto the working contributors, and this very sort of fracturing of the very tenuous nature of what it means to have a pension in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, a pension is meant to be a long game. It's supposed to take place over a period of 30 or 40 or 50 years. When you start to change the rules by which that very long game is played, then it not only jeopardizes the pensions and the capacity to pay the pensions to people that have already retired, but it reduces the likelihood that the people who are paying into the pensions, so the younger workers, are going to get a reasonable benefit from their contributions when it's their turn to take that retirement package. It's a contract. It's a binding contract between generations, and it's not something that you can make decisions about based on things that are happening in a one- or two- or three-year period.

We've heard references about other places where pensions have collapsed. It's mostly because they've taken that trust from the other end, from the young end of the population that's entering into the pension, and made it not worth their while to make those contributions or to maybe move somewhere else with their pension contributions or maybe laid those people off so that they don't even have jobs while at the other end the people who are actually receiving those pensions then are exposed to a very rapidly depleting pool of resources that actually can pay out those pensions.

You know, while I see that the government has really stretched themselves on this – I think they've stretched their credibility on it – I think as well that it's important to call the duplicity of this bill, Bill 9, and Bill 10, too, and call it what it is. It's not just a change to pensions that makes it more difficult, makes it so that an employee has to work longer and pay more contributions and gets less of a result out of it as well, but it's an attack on the very sustainability of these pensions. Period.

I really think that my colleague's amendment is a reasonable one, and I think it's a great chance for us to take two steps back and perhaps clear the waters a little bit and make that consultation process real and substantial.

I mean, that's another part of this whole thing, too. By moving virtually all control of decision-making from the pension boards and from the workers themselves and from the unions that represent them to the ministry, this whole idea of consultation becomes a joke. If you're only consulting and then you bring the hammer down in a very short time period after, then that consultation is nothing but adding insult to injury from the process that's been changed so radically in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, certainly, I'm speaking emphatically in favour of this amendment. I thought I'd try something a little bit different here because, you know, here we are speaking on and on through the night. So I thought I'd give my version of the David Letterman

top 10 reasons why we should not in fact be supporting Bill 9 and we should support this amendment to refer this bill in the first place. I confess, because this is a very sober and not particularly happy topic, that my top 10 list of reasons to not support this bill from Edmonton-Calder, not from David Letterman – I'm not going to use my own name; you have to follow the rules of the House – is a bit of a sober list, but I think it's instructive as well. Sometimes if you try to use a bit of a gimmick, then people are more likely to remember. I'm still a teacher at heart, so I want to put this not just into people's minds but into their hearts as well.

Here we go. In no particular order is my top 10 list of why we shouldn't be supporting Bill 9 and we should refer it, with my apologies to David Letterman. Remember that this isn't funny, okay?

Number 1. If a pension plan looks unstable or unlikely to pay a reasonable return, younger workers will be less likely to contribute and more likely to opt out or to cash out, so don't do that.

Number 2. You work hard, you pay into a pension, and someone tries to change the rules halfway through. What possible positive outcome could come of that?

Ms Blakeman: That's definitely not funny.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It's not funny at all.

Number 3. Bill 45 and Bill 46, the legislative hammer full down on public and private pensions. What's a regular worker to think?

Number 4. Bill 45 and Bill 46, a legislative hammer on the pensions. How is a regular worker supposed to vote?

Number 5. With absolute power to change pension laws, consultation is just having your arm twisted behind your back before they tell you what to do.

Number 6. The government divests itself from pension risk then tries to dictate the terms of your pension. If this was a marriage, a divorce couldn't be far away. That's kind of funny.

Number 7. This one is kind of good. I like this one. The myth about the aging population overwhelming our pensions is absolute nonsense. This PC government makes the baby boom out like it's a big surprise in 2014. Everyone else knew that it was coming nine months after the end of World War II.

10:20

Okay. Here's a lesson for you. Number 8. Pension 101: if you lay off or reduce your public service employees to part-time, the pension will dissolve like sugar in the pouring rain.

Number 9. Seventy per cent of LAPP and PSPP contributing members are women. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives just today has determined that Calgary and Edmonton are the two most difficult cities for women in Canada. This pension attack will solidify our position – it's not a happy thing at all – for a long time to come.

Number 10. The real pension crisis in the province of Alberta is that the majority of Albertans do not have a plan for retirement at all. This minister should go back to the drawing board, go back to Ottawa, where he had a chance to do it in the first place, increase CPP, and build something that we all might be proud of so that we can have a pension for everybody in the future.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Did we get through all 10 of David's top 10?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Ms Blakeman: Oh. Okay. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this going to our committee for the very reasons that the interim Minister of Municipal Affairs gave earlier. There's a lot of discussion going on in the debate on what is accurate, what's not accurate. If you believe that, then it only makes sense that we go to committee with this and iron out a lot of the detail and get down to the facts and negotiate in many ways what is actually happening here. What I'm hearing from the other side is that they don't want to do this.

The arguments I'm hearing from the government are that we should clarify all the comments that are being made and sort of sift through that which is not true and then get right down to the bare bones of what the true facts are and then deal with that issue. That's what the whole committee process is about.

I want to share a little story because there's been a lot of banter going back and forth. The leader of the Liberal opposition made some comments about the coming election. I had the opportunity today to attend the funeral of a very good friend, Mary Troitsky. She was 91 years old. She lived a long and good life, and right up to the very end she was quite clear in her thinking. Actually, I got lucky. I wish I had visited her more, but I visited her just a few days ago, just barely a week ago, and I sat down and had a chat with her. She was in a lot of pain, and she was refusing to take her drugs because she wanted to stay alert to talk to me. She wanted me to stay longer. It was a great conversation because Mary was very sharp when it comes to politics. She wanted to know what we were discussing up here at the Legislature because, as you can imagine – I think it happens in a lot of seniors' lodges – people ask us during question period. So Mary wanted to know about these different bills coming forward.

I talked to her briefly and mentioned all the things that were happening and the positions that I was planning on taking, the positions my caucus was taking, and some of the arguments that were being brought forward by the government members. Mary said a couple of things that caught my attention. She said that she didn't think dying would be so painful, but she said: "Joe, I will be watching you in the Legislature. I don't know if I'm going to be up there or down there, but I will be watching you." I said, "Mary, don't go down there because that's where the PCs are going after they pass this bill." Clearly, she understood. She chuckled. I know that might be insulting to some of the members across the way, but give me a little bit of latitude in the fact that it made this lady's day, one of her very last days.

What she understood was how unjust this bill is. When you look at some of the arguments being made that these unfunded liabilities can be dealt with in no other way, that is not a substantive argument in any way, shape, or form. There are lots of possible solutions that are being brought forward on how to deal with the unfunded liabilities. Where we have some real contradiction is when independent economists look at this and they differ on how this unfunded liability can be taken. There are some contradictions.

One of the ministers over there I think just brought it up. They were talking about the aging population. Now, they were talking about the aging population and its growth, but that contradicts the former Minister of Municipal Affairs dealing with the actuarial curves when we deal with seniors' housing. They don't match. Clearly, there's a contradiction there because if you look at Alberta housing authorities, dealing with seniors' housing, they

show that curve tapering off in relation to our overall population. There are going to be more workers versus retirees, certainly, for our seniors' housing. Those are the contradictions we should be clearing up. We should actually be trying to figure out how best to deal with that and get some answers to the questions so we can bring the proper people forward.

Now, the other thing is this anti-union kind of attitude that has been pervasive. It's striking that we as the Wildrose Party are in agreement in principle, maybe not in the exact context but in principle, with the NDP. So you have the left wing and the right wing on the same side dealing with an issue. I will tell you that it takes progressive out of the whole concept on the other side and makes it regressive. It is out of touch, and it is symptomatic of a party that is not listening. When you hear what the unions have to say and what the people who are actual stakeholders in this have to say, it's that the employers and the employees were not consulted. What you're hearing is that the pension boards themselves are not in agreement with what this government is doing. Yet this government is going to railroad this bill forward anyway.

Now, I told you what Mary Troitsky said, but I will not tell you what her son said because that is not good for this House. The fact is that these people are not wealthy people by any stretch of the imagination. They're hard-working people, and they're symbolic of all the hard-working people that are the stakeholders in this process, and they have no ability to be part of this process. What's happening here is that we're not negotiating. That's what should have happened.

Now, the Wildrose position, as the members have heard – one of the things that is, I think, paramount about our position is that we think you can achieve reform of our pension system if you just sit down and negotiate in good faith. It's foreign to them. I understand that, having passed bills 45 and 46. But the fact is that negotiations have worked quite a long time, long before their 40-year reign on that side.

I don't discount what's happening over there because people do ask me: "Why are they doing this? Why is this government bringing this bill forward now in the framework that they're bringing it forward in?" We have some reports coming out very soon that could give us some valid information on what is actually happening here, but we're intending to pass this bill first, before those boards publish their information so that we can get a look at this. That doesn't make sense. That doesn't make sense. What is the rush? What is the rush?

Clearly, there are a lot of those answers that we just don't have a clear understanding of. When you look at the track record, when you look at what this government has done consistently, it has consistently passed laws where it does not consult. It has consistently passed laws in such a rapid way, shape, and form that we end up coming back to it in very short order to make amendments because we get things wrong. That's not logical, that's not prudent, and that's not practical, but it is the practice that this government has adopted and continues to adopt in addressing most every issue that now comes before it.

We just saw it with the homeowners' warranty act. I mean, we passed it not too long ago. Bang. We've got an amending act coming right away. Here we're coming up with something that is questionable, which will probably be tested in court like bills 45 and 46 were, and we'll be interested to see whether or not it survives. Clearly, that type of legal battle could be avoided if this government would only act in good faith and sit down and negotiate.

10:30

The mockery of acting in good faith I don't understand. I just don't understand it from that side. In principle what works in our

system of governance is negotiation. We're going to pass another bill that gives ultimate authority to cabinet to make decisions arbitrarily. We've seen that with landowner rights. We're now going to see that with pensions. We saw that with union negotiations, or union non-negotiations. None of that makes sense. I don't understand how this government thinks that it can continue this behaviour and there won't be consequences.

I would disagree with the hon. Liberal leader. I don't think you should put this off and make it an election issue. I think you should railroad it through, and we'll make it an election issue, and we're going to. This isn't going to survive, I do not think, in the next election.

The fear factor . . .

An Hon. Member: Heard that before.

Mr. Anglin: You've heard it. That's right. You heard it before, and you survived.

But the fear factor that you created by fantasy has nothing to do with the reality of what you pass. That will come back eventually. It'll probably be interesting to see how the potential leadership candidates are going to deal with this issue, as they vie to buy votes. In the end, regardless of what leader is chosen, what new Premier is elected by the governing party, it will now be an election issue. Clearly, it will not go away.

People who have pensions or those people who have started to work and have agreed to work for this retirement package, which is the incentive, will have to make a decision, whether they have been reneged on or not. It's not really up to that side or this side to decide whether they've been reneged on. They will make that decision themselves, but it's a decision that I'm confident that, when people go to vote with their wallets, they will understand.

Now, the idea of the fearmongering, that it's going to break the system or it's going to saddle taxpayers, is an interesting argument based on one thing, that the returns are not going to be there, that the contributions are not going to be there. But when someone studies the history of how these programs work, there are cycles, and there have always been cycles. If the projections are true, depending on whose projections you take, there may still continue to be cycles. The government themselves have admitted that without doing anything, the time frame for dealing with this unfunded liability in a positive way – the only thing we're debating is in how many years it will be rectified, depending on whose argument you believe. With that in mind, it's hard to imagine that we cannot set the agenda for some sort of reconciliation of that liability if we sit down at the table and negotiate in good faith.

We don't need the bills. What we need is a government that acts in good faith and negotiates these pension and comes up with a solution that both parties can agree to as a positive step forward to bring reform forward. With the pensions boards themselves being opposed to what this government is doing, we're going to legislate instead of even having the pension boards onside. That is a clear indication that the government is acting too fast. It's a clear indication that the government is not acting in good faith, in my view.

They need to do better, and they can do better if they will only listen, but they don't listen. That's the problem with what's going on with negotiations. What they do is just dictate what they plan on doing regardless of whatever input is given. So if they hear contradictory input, they discount it. If they hear something they like, that's what they're going to go with. That doesn't make sense. That's not a good way to manage your government. That's not a good way to manage your finances. We're seeing it in the

budget. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that right from the Speaker's chair itself on a point of order the other day the Speaker ruled and said: people have a different definition of what debt is and what debt is not. It's quite interesting because we're actually having that argument about the budget.

But we get into the same situation here, where people have a different definition of what is an unfunded liability and what is not and how it should be dealt with. I don't think we're in disagreement that we need to deal with the unfunded liability, and we need to deal with it in a constructive manner so that we fund that liability and not to the detriment of the taxpayers. To claim that we can't do that: I won't buy into that argument.

There are a lot of different ways we can handle that situation. When you look at some of the independent studies, the one in particular that the union has brought forward, one of the government's arguments is that the return that that study had projected was far too great. Well, it's interesting because when you listen to this government project some of the returns for their own funding as far as for growth and everything else, I'm not so sure we're too far off or who's exaggerating what. But we know that economists take their best shot at things, and they try to do what they can. The reality is that if that unfunded liability is now dropping . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The member was talking about the unfunded liability, and I'd just like to hear a few more of his comments on that.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question because that's really what this whole argument is about. As I understand it, why the government is bringing the bill forward is to deal with this one particular issue. I see the minister shaking his head no. It seems to have dominated the debate. But if the real reason the minister was bringing this forward is so the minister or the cabinet can have more power over this, that I would actually disagree with. I don't think they need more power over this.

Certainly, setting something like unilaterally being able to set the contribution rates is something that I think is actually quite dangerous. Contribution rates go up, and they go down, and rightfully so. It all depends on the state of the economy. It all depends on a number of factors dealing with the employment and how many workers versus how many retirees. It isn't something that you want government to do. It is really the flexibility of allowing the boards to do this.

Now, where I think we're disagreeing is that some of the information we're getting is that some of those liabilities are actually dropping. They're regressing now or digressing, depending on which argument and the side of the floor you're on. The government's argument that they're on a trajectory just to stay right out of control is not supported by every argument given, not just in the political debate but in the independent analyses that have been provided by different agencies that have looked at this.

Again, that's why this amendment is actually quite good. If we bring it to committee, we get now to bring the people in front of that committee who can actually provide more than a political input and provide that actuarial input that gives us hard numbers to work on so that we can get down to how best to approach this.

The other thing is that it's also a great way to actually negotiate with the stakeholders that are directly affected, those employers that are dealing with this and the employees. That is critical, and we're not doing that. Now, again, we get into this argument where the government may say: yes, we are. But we're hearing from the union, we're hearing from the stakeholders that, no, they're not. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that when one side on the negotiating table or the consultation table is saying, "You haven't consulted with me," I think that's a valid point. I think that's a valid point.

Even if you can't come to an agreement, you should be able to come to an agreement that you're being consulted, and we're not there yet. Maybe that should be the litmus test for this government, that maybe they'll never see eye to eye with the labour force, but they should at least have an agreement that they feel like they've been consulted. They don't have that feeling. They're not making that claim; they're making just the opposite one.

10:40

The whole issue of dealing with every stakeholder, every level of this argument of what should be done for pension reform, how it should be done, and how it should be implemented is something that should be taking place at the negotiating table, and it's not. So the best place, then, to bring this bill is to committee, as this amendment has proposed, and let's start the process and get these stakeholders there so that we can actually look at the particular issues that this government has and maybe some other possible solutions on how to deal with it.

I saw the minister shaking his head, but I will tell you that I've heard an awful lot lately about the unfunded liability and the way forward on how we're going to deal with retirement and deal with it in a very pragmatic and practical way so that people can have some sort of retirement that government itself, when it hires employees, has as an incentive. You know as well as most people here that there's a lot of misinformation out there about how well government employees get paid. Well, actually, it's not exactly true, particularly in Alberta. There's a lot of money to be made in the oil patch. But there is stability in government work, and there are some good benefits, and that's why people have chosen to go that route versus the private sector. They provide a good service for this government, doing what needs to be done in the governance of this province. There's all that balancing of having these benefits, and the retirement is part of that benefit. To change the rules midstream for some people is not in good faith.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: I think Calgary-Buffalo was next if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I had you on the list, but if you want to cede to Calgary-Buffalo, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to the amendment forwarded by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that essentially wishes to send this bill to a standing committee to discuss it further, where we can assess the facts, where we can clear through all the rhetoric and ascertain what the government is or is not trying to do to this bill and call in some people who would have relevant information to present to the members on that committee, to really evaluate what is happening.

In my view what we have seen here in this bill is a continuation of this Progressive Conservative government's unprecedented

attack on the working people of Alberta. We have seen that that has been their go-to plan since the election in 2012. We've seen them in the last session, in bills 45 and 46, and now in this session, in bills 9 and 10, essentially going after the working people of Alberta who work in our hospitals, who work in our schools, who work in this building, who are our civil servants, who assist the government in doing their jobs, a variety of people throughout this province, from social workers, from individuals who help us through our daily lives, that this government has chosen to go to war with, essentially.

[Mr. Casey in the chair]

It's something they did not signal that was coming in the last election. If we look, what the government really presented to the people of Alberta in the last election was that they were actually going to be progressive rather than conservative. What they were going to do was to value the workers of Alberta, value public-sector workers, and see predictable, sustainable funding go to these institutions that make our society run, like public education and health care and police and fire and EMS and our long-term care centres and the like. That's what we were led to believe the government was running on in the last election. That's why we're here at this stage and almost dumbfounded at what has transpired over the course of the last couple of years. No one saw this coming. I'm certain you didn't. You read your election platform. You didn't see anything in there about, you know, Bill 45, Bill 46, or bills 9 and 10. I know I didn't, and I know that you didn't or else you might have considered possibly not running. If you would have known this was in the cards, it would have contradicted exactly what you were bringing to your voters. That's why we're surprised that we're here today.

If we look at this bill, we have to remember that when pension plans exist, they are negotiated contracts between the employee and the employer, okay? They get together at the bargaining table, they establish what their wage is going to be, and they establish then how much they're going to contribute to their pensions plans. It's part of their compensation package that has been mutually agreed on. This is how it is.

What has been explained is that many people go into the public service for that benefit, the benefit that I'm going to trade off some earnings today for protection in the future. That's how it has been. That's how you are going about it with a defined benefit package, which has been what these workers were going to receive up until this time, until the introduction of this bill.

What we see will happen with this bill is that – and let's be clear. The reason the government seems to be going after these pension plans is because they're in a revenue problem. They have a revenue problem that is of their own making. Instead of reasonably going after progressive taxation or looking at corporate taxation or the like, we choose then to squeeze hard-working Albertans instead of asking millionaires and billionaires to pay a reasonable rate of tax. Let's be clear. This is all that is happening here. The government had a choice.

Let's remember that if the flat tax was such a brilliant idea, which allows these millionaires and billionaires to get off the hook from paying a reasonable rate, why hasn't any other province done it? Really, if it was such a boon to governments and the like, you'd think someone might have followed along. Nevertheless, instead of common sense, they are going to war with our public-sector unions, the people who provide the day-to-day services.

Like I said, you know, how pensions work is that when people retire, they can expect a reasonable, predictable amount of money that comes every month. That's what a defined benefit plan is. It

allows people to live with a reasonable sense of dignity. What the government's changes are doing is moving it from a defined benefit plan into, essentially, a targeted benefit plan. And here's how the government is doing this. It is making a hard cap on contributions, so that means that employee contributions to the pension plans are capped as well as employer contributions are capped.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

What happens as a result of this? Inevitably what happens is that something like the 2008 market crash will happen. Like it did in 2008, it wiped out the stock market. Pension plans primarily have investments in stock markets and other financial instruments that provide a financial return that you can then pay out in benefits to the people who are retired. That's how they work, okay? Most people should know that the market is not perfect. Inevitably the market breaks down like it did in 2008. You have downturns and dramatic downturns that can last for years. You know, I think the stock market came out of the '08 crash about three years later, but we've had crashes that have lasted for decades.

10:50

When you limit the hard cap on contributions that employees and employers can make, what the minister and the government are essentially doing is destining these plans to eventually be unworkable in some form and fashion at some time in their future. Because of this clause, the hard cap on contributions, these plans are destined to fail. That's why, in my view, it is unwise. The minister's great claim as to why he believes this needs to happen is that he needs to save the pensions for the future. That is what he has proclaimed to be doing this for. In his heart of hearts he doesn't want to do this. That's what he says. He says: I have to do it to save these pension plans.

Now, I take that message with a little bit of a grain of salt and look at it in the cold light of day. I look at their budgets and the other things, and I recognize it more as a talking point rather than actual reality. But if we look at what that will do, what they do when you make these hard caps to the contributions, when inevitably the financial instruments that pay pensions break down, the pension plan has no ability to raise revenue to pay benefits. They can't get more money from the people who are working. They can't get more money from the employer. And some of the people who are retired – guess what? – are 90 and 95 years old. They can't work, okay? They've been retired. So where do they get the money? They don't.

Say if this happens like in the 1929 market crash, which could happen again, guys, you know, where do they go to get this revenue when you put a hard cap on contributions? The argument is, well, we're just going to let the plans fail because the markets are – the government essentially, by putting this in, is saying that the market is always right. Yes, a lot of right wingers tend to believe that. But when we actually look at the brass tacks on how pension plans work, this is just lunacy. So we can see how this clause effectively destines the pension plan to be destroyed, in my view, at some point in time in the future. So you're not saving it. You're destining it to failure on some level or another. In that respect I don't think you can take the minister's words at face value, that he's doing this to save the pensions for the future, because in my view it essentially assures that they will be destroyed.

What happens then? You know, there was much conversation. I believe the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West made this point. Well, where do the liabilities go, you know, liabilities on all taxpayers and the like for these pension losses? Well, if we just

sort of play this around a bit, what happens here? What I believe will essentially happen sometime in – I can't give a time. Let's say market breakdowns happen once every 25 years. The fundamental nature has a habit of wreaking havoc on pension plans and benefits. So what happens then?

Well, what happens then? My hope is that the government of the day, whoever that may be, will not turn its back on these people who were receiving pension benefits. When they find there are no pension benefits to be paid because there's no way to raise revenue from the workers or anything, my hope is that the government of the day will not turn their back on them. So those liabilities, essentially taking the care and the concern of seniors and people who live in this province who worked in our public services, who worked in our hospitals, who worked in our schools, who worked as social workers, who helped people get through the day in our society: the government of the day wouldn't turn their back on them. That's my hope. I don't think that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West would want that to happen either.

The liabilities automatically flow back to the government in any event, okay? We saw that. There's a case in point where that exactly played out this summer in the flood. You'll remember that even though we didn't make the changes from the Groeneveld report, we saw the carnage that happened. The government really could have essentially said: "You know, we're not going to help those people who got flooded out. We're going to leave it to the market to figure it out. Really, we're Conservatives, so we believe in everyone pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps." They could have taken that principle. Instead, they recognized that, no, when we have 50,000 of our citizens whose lives have been dramatically upturned, we're going to go and step in and help out. Okay. That's a real-life example of what's going to happen.

If we look at how these pension plans work, what is essentially happening here is that they are fundamentally wrecking them going forward. In my view, it will not lead to a healthy public service. It will not lead to a reasonable retirement and the like. But if we look into more detail, just to sort of segue off that point into some of the other large global factors that I see happening out there in the world, I believe this government should be concerned about – in fact, all members of this Legislature should be concerned about this – our aging population and the fact that many people, more people than we've seen in the last 60 or 70 years, are going to reach retirement with very little ability to pay for their retirement essentially, to live or to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: I just wonder if the member would be willing to complete that thought, to finish the section he was talking about.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, for allowing me to finish. That's very kind.

We're seeing seniors reaching their retirement years with virtually very little savings or ability to finance a 20-, 30-year retirement. Inevitably that is going to come back onto the government's shoulders. You know, we can say that we're as conservative as we want: no, they didn't save for their future; let them eat cake. But we're not going to do that. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Seniors vote, okay? Guess what? Hopefully, we have some dignity and we understand that life is hard and that we should understand that we have a duty to assist people. We're going to have government housing. We're going to have a seniors'

benefit. Hopefully, the governing party will get onboard with having some actual CPP reform, that actually reflects the true cost of retirement.

The simple fact of the matter is that there's good reason why people are not retiring with as much income or don't have the ability to retire in the same fashion that people have for the last 60 or 70 years. Simply put, there's much research that exists out there – from Harvard, from Yale, and from other places – that the hard costs on the middle class since 1971 have dramatically increased. Simply put, day-to-day living – having kids, cars, going to jobs, and providing for your families – is more expensive than it was pre-1971. I know that seems counterintuitive. We think people are frivolously spending their money on restaurants, vacations, and the like, but there's some hard research that indicates the hard costs on the middle class, that it's more difficult today than it was 40 years ago. This is fact.

Accordingly, governments are going to have to get their heads around this and look at how they're going to provide seniors with a reasonable semblance of living, not only because it's the right thing to do but that – remember – seniors vote, right? Exactly. All parties are going to do this regardless of our ideology and the like, so we need to get a hold on that.

11:00

Another thing that bothers me about this is that here we are where many people who are working in our public sector happen to be women. Seventy per cent of the workers in our public services and the ones we're attacking are women. Women are more likely to retire into poverty than men, okay? This is fact. Given that women often enter the work world later because primarily they're doing the good work of bringing up the next generation for many years and doing other things to help our society, they don't have the ability to save as much money. Here are the people we're attacking: women who are working in our public service who are hopefully trying to have a decent retirement.

In any event, all this being said, the government is going to pay one way or another, and we should, but we should try to recognize that what we're doing to this pension plan, for all intents and purposes, is destroying it. In my view, it doesn't hold water that we're trying to save it. In my view, it eventually is going to come apart at the seams at some point in time due to some financial meltdown one way or another.

Those are my submissions, Mr. Speaker. I believe that's why we should take it to an all-party committee, so that we can ferret out what is real and what is not real and get to the true essence of why we're doing this at this time here in Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak on the amendment to refer this to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. There's been a lot of discussion about: why are we doing this? Is there a hidden agenda for the government? There's no hidden agenda here.

I've had a lot of time to talk to the boards. I've had a lot of time to talk to pensions outside of our province. Frankly, there are very few pensions outside or even inside the province that are built or structured the way that these pensions are structured. They were structured and built in the '60s for a different type of employee and employment. They were structured when, you know, the

mortality rates were different, when there was an ability to continue to keep new contributors coming into the plans even though you had people that were going into the retirement side and becoming noncontributors, if you will.

There's been lots of discussion about, you know, that there's been an independent actuarial report that claims that there's no reason to do anything. I said last night in this House that, frankly, leadership is not about doing nothing. Leadership is about making sure that you are keeping a plan that's sustainable for future employees. It's about ensuring that there is something there for the employees that are going to come behind the ones that are there today. It's also about ensuring that the plan that is there, the pension promise – and I'll say it again, Mr. Speaker. The pension promise isn't cost-of-living adjustments. The pension promise is not early retirement subsidy. The pension promise is the fact that regardless of what you've put into the plan, you will be getting a guaranteed amount for the rest of your life based on years of service and your last highest five years of pensionable earnings. That's the pension promise that 85 per cent of Albertans don't have.

I actually agree with the hon. members opposite that we do need to look at retirement planning for all Albertans. I note with interest that the federal government today is talking about introducing targeted pension plans for some of the private-sector corporations that they have. That's because there is a realization, Mr. Speaker, that we do need to help Canadians and Albertans plan for the future.

The hon. members across the way – and this is a bit of a sidebar, and I'll watch where my time is because I do have some other things I wanted to say. The hon. members opposite talked about that Alberta didn't want to do something with CPP last December. That's just simply not true, Mr. Speaker. In fact, all provinces – all provinces – agreed that we wanted to continue to talk about issues around CPP and that perhaps we could have some add-ons to CPP, that perhaps we could look at changes to CPP to make it more attractive because in Alberta we do view it as a way to attract. That's why we introduced pooled registered pension plans in this House. That's why we're going to proceed with that, because we actually do believe that there is an issue there for that other 85 per cent of the population.

I will also say, and I've said it in the House before, that when we started this process two years ago – and we did start it two years ago, in July 2012, with the plans – I remember very distinctly going into a meeting, a room with all of the pension boards, the four boards of which, as the Minister of Finance, I have the honour of being the trustee and the fiduciary duty, Mr. Speaker, to ensure their sustainability. I walked into the room thinking: "Boy, we've got this unfunded liability. It's growing. I think I agree with the Wildrose. It should be defined contribution, we should cut off new entrants, and all new entrants should come in through a different plan." That was what I thought.

After the last two years, Mr. Speaker, I've actually become a defined benefit plan proponent. I actually believe that there is a way to make defined benefit plans sustainable for our employees and, in fact, sustainable in other sections of our economy. But they have to be designed right. They have to be designed in such a way that the levers, all three levers, can be utilized by the plan sponsors. It shouldn't be the Minister of Finance that's the sponsor; it should be the people that are paying. I agree with that, too.

It also shouldn't be that it's just the contributions that are the only levers that the plan board has to manage that account because

that's not fair to the workers. Every time that contribution rate goes up, it's money off their cheque. In the last 20 years they have had the ability to use other levers besides that, but they've never used any other levers. Only contribution rates have gone up. Today, as the Auditor General noted very clearly, we have some of the highest contribution rates in the country.

When we say a contribution cap, we are not going to unilaterally impose it on them. In fact, I met with all of the unions not too long ago. I know there are representatives in the gallery. We are going to have a consultation and a discussion paper on contribution rates. The paper is going to be out late tomorrow or early Friday this week. We're going to start that discussion as soon as we can get everybody together, and I am actually quite open to having a discussion about what that might be. Maybe it's a range like New Brunswick has. I found out that they went to a range. I'm perfectly open to having that conversation.

But the plans have to be able to have the ability to manage themselves using all the levers. One of the levers that the Teachers' Pension Plan in Ontario, one of the gold standards of defined benefit plans in the country . . .

An Hon. Member: Gold standard.

Mr. Horner: Yeah, gold standard. Go figure.

One of the things they've done is they've said to their plan members: if you want to maintain the pension promise that we have in the plan, we have got to make COLA conditional because if we can't afford to pay it, we can't dip into the plan's funds; we can't raise rates just because that's the thing to do. You have to have that flexibility. So that's what they've done just this year, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker. It's one of, probably, the best-funded plans that's out there, but they recognized that you've got to have that flexibility.

I know that in New Brunswick some of the plan members talk about: well, those plans all cratered. Why did they crater? Because governments did not take leadership when they should have to ensure that it wouldn't happen. B.C. took leadership on this file some years ago, and they've actually converted a lot of their plans to very similar things, that we've got on the table today. Saskatchewan, as the hon. member from the Wildrose suggested, went DC for everybody 35 years ago, when the unfunded liability was considerably smaller and was very easy to handle.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of misinformation that's actually out there today. And one of them is that this is going to harm the pension promise to retirees today. It is not. We are talking about guaranteeing all service up to 2015, and for anybody who is retired today, that guarantee holds. We talked about the fact that if service beyond 2015 is going to be part of the new one, we'll put the calculators out on the website for the LAPP, the PSPP, and the SFPP. We are closing out the management employees pension plan, but we're going to make sure that those who are in it get the benefits that they signed up for.

To suggest that, well, we'll just cancel everybody else when the new entrants come in: who's going to pay for the subsidized retirement and the COLA benefits of those that are in if you have no new contributors coming in? Who's going to pay that, Mr. Speaker? They haven't thought that out very well.

11:10

Mr. Speaker, I don't do this because I think that there's some, you know, huge number of votes that it's going to get me. The hon. members will find out very shortly about where I think I might head in my career. This has no bearing on it. I do this

because it's the right thing to do. I do this because I do believe that a defined benefit plan is an attraction for the public service. There will be no other defined benefit plans out there. Most of them have already gone or will be going. The public sector is the place where these plans can thrive, and that's why we're going to create a situation where they can flourish.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. members opposite are all correct about the returns that these plans will make and that things will be great and rosy in the future, then under the joint sponsorship they can make the decisions that they want to make about COLA, about early retirement, about contribution rates because the funding will be there for it. I honestly hope that that is the case.

But what if it's not and we've tied the hands so that only one lever is available? Then what? New Brunswick? The state of Maine? Holland? These are the places that did nothing until it was too late. We can't be that place for these people or for the thousands of public service employees that are counting on their pensions in the future. We can't be that place. We do need to take action. This is modest action. This is not the action that has been taken in other jurisdictions, where they've actually done what the Wildrose is talking about doing. This is not taking that drastic step to say: no more defined benefit, no more of those things. This is an honest attempt to actually preserve what they hold so dear, which is that pension promise. And for that I make no apologies because it is the right thing to do.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate on this referral motion and take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has moved to adjourn debate on amendment RA1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 6

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mr. Weadick]

The Deputy Speaker: Is there a speaker?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 7

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mr. Horner]

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

Mr. Horner: Has it been moved, Mr. Speaker? It has? [interjections] I hear huge support, Mr. Speaker, so I'll just take my seat and call the vote.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and I would like to jointly move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:14 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 24, 2014

Issue 23a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 24, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. As this week of work in the Assembly draws to a close, let us be mindful of the weekend of work that awaits us in our constituencies where we live. May our strength and resolve be fortified in that regard. And on this weekend, that ushers in the National Day of Mourning for injured workers, on April 28, let us pray for those workers who have been killed, injured, or disabled as a result of work-related incidents. Our thoughts are with their friends, their families, loved ones, colleagues, and workers. May all of our workforce return home safely and soundly at the end of each workday. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us begin with school groups. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I have a fantastic school visiting from my constituency, and today we have 45 students from the Ashmont school joining us. They are joined by some excellent teachers and group leaders. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 66 of the very best grade 6 students and teachers Alberta has to offer. They are here visiting us from the Iron Ridge junior campus in Blackfalds. I would now ask that these students and their teachers Mr. Bill Carter, Ms Jodi Vanderzwaag, Mrs. Cheryl Taylor, Mrs. Rochelle Miller, Miss Raeann McNaught, and Ms Amy Lasher please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Not yet. Okay. Let us move on then with Edmonton-South West, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special guests, who are also both Queen's Diamond Jubilee recipients.

My first guest is Shayne Smith. Shayne is visiting our province and attending two schools in south Edmonton as a motivational speaker, bringing the message: there is no limit. Shayne has lived this message. When Shayne was four months old, he contracted a rare form of meningitis, which left him in a coma for 10 days. He then required amputations of both his legs, one hand, and half of each finger on the other hand and was given less than a 2 per cent chance to survive.

Since this he has shown nothing but determination and athletic ability. By the age of three he learned to swim. He learned to ride a horse and received special permission to play on the T-ball team. He also played sledge hockey and wheelchair basketball. Shayne has had several great accomplishments in his basketball career. In

2005 he was drafted as a player for the Canadian junior wheelchair basketball team and played at the world championships in England. In 2011 the team travelled to Japan, where they won gold. Now Shayne travels Canada, speaking to youth about there being no limits in what a person can do.

With Shayne is Daylin Breen, a constituent of Edmonton-South West but also a strong advocate for many community initiatives, for which he was honoured with his Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal. Both are wonderful men, and I would ask them to acknowledge the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a true pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very important people in my world. I would like to start by introducing my wife, Sally. Many of you have had the opportunity and pleasure of meeting Sally, and for those of you who have, I'm sure you would all agree: definitely the better half.

With Sally is my mother-in-law, Ms Mervat Kharsa. Like every mother-in-law, Mr. Speaker, she is my visiting dignitary. Thank you for allowing her to sit in your gallery today. She immigrated to Canada from Egypt 39 years ago and has had a very successful career as a professional engineer here in Canada. This is her first time experiencing any Westminster system in action. She always puts our family first and is a huge support. Thank you for being here.

Now, with them is my son Jude. Jude has been looking forward to today for a very long time, not just simply because he loves this building and all of you fine people but because today is his fourth birthday. I appreciate your indulgence, Mr. Speaker. We all know how important it is to share birthdays. I thank both of you for taking the time to be here today to allow me to share in it. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a tough act to follow, but it does make the point of how important one's family is. Many of us here, I know, probably spend more time with our staff and co-workers than we do with our family. It is my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my staff in my office. They work very hard. They are professionals who are committed not only to agriculture but to all Albertans. One of the best things about them is that they make me laugh. They're great people, and they also keep me young. I'll just call their names, ask them to stand, and then we can acknowledge them once they've all stood: my chief of staff, Nick Harsulla, in the members' gallery; my correspondence assistant, Tracy Kully; my scheduler, Brittney Timperley; my press secretary – Julie, stand up – who says that she prefers to be called the agricultural spin doctor rather than a political animal; and my special assistant, Shannon McLaughlin. Colleagues, if you could please acknowledge them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's truly a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of

this Assembly a wonderful ambassador for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo as well as a dear friend, Tracy McKinnon. Tracy is the current chair of the Fort McMurray Catholic school board, was the past co-chair of the child and family services authority in Fort McMurray, and she has just recently completed her term with the Wood Buffalo Health Advisory Council. As you can see, Tracy is a very active member of our community. She is here in Edmonton, along with the Alberta School Boards Association Advocacy Committee, promoting partners in education. I was pleased to attend their MLA reception last night promoting conversations between the Alberta school board zones 2 and 3 and the members of this Assembly. I'd ask that she now rise and receive the warmest welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Kathryn Doyle, a 14-year-old honour student who attends Lorne Akins school in St. Albert. She's here with her mother, Donna Doyle. On May 10 Kathryn will participate in an Olympian distance challenge, where swimmers can see how far they can swim in two hours. The money raised benefits diabetes research in Alberta. Last year she was a top fundraiser, raising over \$1,700 and swimming eight kilometres. This year she wants to raise \$4,000 and swim over nine and a half kilometres. I know she's written some of you, and I encourage all the MLAs to give her their support. In fact, I think she's already sent out a tweet, that I'll retweet out, and I'd encourage every other member to do that as well. I'd ask Kathryn and her mother to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

I'd also like to introduce you to Frank Klemen and his assistant Mary Egan. Frank is the president of Support to Individuals at Risk in Everyone's Neighbourhood Society, or SIRENS. SIRENS' mission is to improve the lives of youth at risk and the mentally ill suffering in the Edmonton area. They'll be leading the first-ever aboriginal parade through downtown Edmonton on June 20, 2015. They're always looking for volunteers and support, and I encourage members to check them out. Mary's Facebook page is Mary Egan. Together we can truly make a difference in the lives of people in our community. I'd ask Frank and Mary to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, my last one is a very special introduction. Her name is Eva Bereti. Eva grew up in a residential school, where she was treated poorly. Having said that, she got an education, and she taught in the education system for 31 years, 28 of those years in the Catholic school system. She helped found Maskwacis school. She helped found a lunch program for aboriginal children in Catholic schools. She brought children and their parents to the Faculty Club to let them know what it's like to go to university in an education atmosphere. She has worked tirelessly to help improve the lives of vulnerable children and their families. She herself has given birth to four children, has eight grandchildren, and still has a lot more to do. I'd ask Eva to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine, Dixie Dahlstedt from Ashmont. Dixie was

born and raised in Edmonton and attended both the University of Alberta and the University of Manitoba, graduating with an honours degree in architecture. Dixie has worked on many projects familiar to all of us, served as a lecturer at Mount Royal college, and served on the board of Alberta Ballet, all before moving to New York, where she worked at one of the top three architectural firms in New York City before starting her own firm. She is an outstanding Albertan and has recently returned home. I'd ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour for a ministerial statement.

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an important and very sombre day across our nation. That is April 28th, National Day of Mourning, the day that we remember and honour those lives that were lost or injured on the job. It also serves as a critical reminder to all of us to renew and reaffirm our commitment to improving health and safety in our workplaces. We must work vigilantly to prevent further workplace deaths, injuries, and diseases.

Each day in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, more than 2 million people go to work with the expectation of arriving home healthy and safe at the end of their shift. It brings to me great sadness to say that this isn't always the case. In 2013 188 of our workers did not make it home to their loved ones. The lives of 37 Alberta workers were lost as a result of motor vehicle accidents. An additional 52 Alberta workers never made it home to their families because of preventable work incidents, and a sobering 99 of our workers passed away last year as a result of occupational diseases due to past exposures. I offer my deepest condolences to the families, friends, and co-workers whose lives have been forever changed by these workplace injuries and fatalities.

National Day of Mourning reminds us all that despite these tragic events there is a community of support in our province, across the country, and around the world that can help guide us through this sadness. National Day of Mourning is also an important reminder of why we do what we do, why we must be relentless in our efforts to keep Alberta workplaces healthy and safe. While we pause to reflect on this one day of mourning, April 28, we must every day be vigilant in our effort to protect the living, to ensure that no more fathers, children, or spouses have to endure the pain of learning their loved ones won't be returning home.

There is not one incident, not one set of circumstances under which workplace death, injury, or disease can be dismissed or excused. The province continues to invest in health and safety and creating measures to prevent these unacceptable losses. We have recently graduated our first class of occupational health and safety peace officers, and every year more officers are taking proactive measures. I would like to thank our Minister of Justice for his help in that project.

In addition to our compliance activities we continue to invest directly in our occupational disease and injury prevention program. We fully understand that a majority of our workplace

deaths from occupational disease are from past failures to understand the impacts of minerals, chemicals, and other substances.

On this day of mourning I hope all Albertans will take a moment to think of those who lost their lives on the job. Talk about it at your safety meetings and around the lunchroom table and again at home at the dinner table with your families. We all have a role to play in keeping our workplaces healthy and safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition or someone on behalf of Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for speaking so compassionately in commemorating this day of mourning as we remember those injured and killed on the job. Our deepest sympathies go out to all who remember and mourn on a more personal level.

Those of us sitting here today work in a safe place. An accidental slip of the tongue may embarrass us, but we won't likely need first aid, just a little help getting our foot out of our mouth. However, many jobs do expose people to risks of injury and, sadly, even death. Years of experience, with lessons learned the hard way, have brought us to a point where job risks are being mitigated. Technology, education, and training are playing an important role. In conjunction with trade associations and stakeholder engagement effective safety programs are being developed and implemented. Some younger employees may not be used to following workplace rules and don't realize that safe procedures and practices have evolved over time and often at great cost and in injury to earlier workers. If we don't learn from our mistakes, we're destined to repeat them.

When I teach life skills and employability to trades students, I always emphasize the importance of learning all the rules and procedures and asking questions about any they don't understand or are having trouble learning. "Lloyd can't hitchhike anymore," I say to get their attention. When they ask what I mean, I explain that Lloyd had been taught and was clear on a procedure for safely removing the steel guide pins on the sides of the live roll at the back of an oil field trailer or bed truck. The swamper, a truck driver's helper, has to grasp the three- to four-centimetre pin with just the tip of his thumb and finger. That's so that if the load slips or slides while it's being winched on, he won't get hurt. Being in a hurry one day, Lloyd grabbed the pin with his thumb wrapped all the way around it just a moment before the load slid. It pinched his thumb, severing it. Preventable? Of course. Properly trained and aware of the risks? He was. So how did it happen? In a moment of haste Lloyd thought he'd be okay just this once. He wasn't.

We need constant vigilance, regular review, remedial training, watching out for each other, timely feedback, getting in the habit of always doing it right the first time, the safe way. We now have new OH and S inspectors, that were referred to, trained to enforce safety rules on the job sites – they need to – in a consistent and timely manner. Safety is everyone's responsibility. There must never be situations where pressure is allowed to compromise proven procedures for the sake of expediency. "Just this once" should never be uttered or allowed or even thought.

Workers and their families are depending on us as legislators to do our part to ensure all job sites are safe. I know it's the fondest wish of all of us here that Alberta workers will return home safely at the end of each day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent is likely to be asked for by Edmonton-Centre. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues in the Assembly if they would be willing to grant unanimous consent to the leaders of the third party and the fourth party or their representatives to be able to respond to the minister's statement.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: As you know, by the rules, hon. members, unanimous consent is required for others to participate. We have at least three requests at this stage from three separate entities. I'll ask one question. Does anybody object to granting unanimous consent for these other representatives to join in this discussion? If you do, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us proceed with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All workplace deaths are preventable. They arise from unsafe working conditions, lack of training, unsafe choices. Workplace deaths are a tragedy individually, in a family, and in a community. Alberta had 110 occupational deaths in 2007, roughly 9 deaths per 100,000 worker-year population. Last year there were 173 deaths on the job. The workplace fatality rate has declined in the last few years, according to WCB, but Alberta and B.C. still have among the highest in Canada, excluding the Northwest Territories. Alberta employs only 1.4 health and safety inspectors per 10,000 workers. The national average is 2 per 10,000 workers. Occupational health and safety prosecutions, already among the lowest in Canada, dropped to only a few last year despite 173 deaths on the job. Farm workers in Alberta died at a higher rate, 10 per 100,000, averaging 18 farm deaths per year over the last 20 years. Unacceptable, preventable tragedies.

It must be mentioned that this includes 25 major injuries per death at a huge health care cost, not borne by these corporations but by our public health system, according to the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research.

Deaths and disabling injuries among farm workers are particularly common and troubling in light of this government's deliberate exclusion of paid farm workers, even on the large factory farms – beef, chicken, hog, and dairy – from any oversight. It's shocking to most Alberta consumers to learn that the very people that provide our daily bread, potatoes, corn, and beef do not have the protection of occupational health and safety or workers' compensation. After a decade of denial and referral to committees this government refuses to give farm workers, including children, the right to and the benefit of what every other worker enjoys in the workplace in the 21st century: standard workplace protection, timely inspection, and diligent investigation of deaths or injuries.

Loss of life due to preventable work-related injury is a most fundamental responsibility for modern government. Only the first step is to ensure a well-educated workforce. Laws are essential where lives are at stake, including legislated standards and enforcement of those standards. Albertans, including children, deserve a higher level of investment in prevention in workplaces today.

This National Day of Mourning must be matched by action and investment in the evidence that leads to safer workplaces and safe workers. We can and we must do better on this recurring theme of neglect in Alberta today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to acknowledge the families and loved ones of those Albertans who have lost their lives this year, in particular the most recent Albertan to have lost his life at work, Shane Daye, who passed away this week. My condolences and those of my caucus go out to his family and to all families of workers who have died or been seriously injured on the job.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to suggest that in Alberta the government's failure to protect workers from injury and death in the workplace has been tragically inadequate for years. Alberta has the worst occupational health and safety laws in the country. New rules that would allow occupational health and safety officers to issue tickets haven't resulted in a single fine. We have ridiculously low maximum penalties in Alberta for employers who put their workers at risk, and we're barely enforcing those. Just this month we learned that the number of safety breaches that the Crown prosecutes has dropped dramatically this year, with no adequate explanation. Finally, this PC government refuses to extend occupational health and safety protection to farm workers, resulting in hundreds of needless deaths and serious injuries.

Now, Mr. Speaker, where workers can't count on the government to help them keep safe, one would hope that the tools would be there for them to do that themselves. Unfortunately, Alberta is still the only province in the country which refuses to mandate joint worker-employer work-site health and safety committees. This mechanism works throughout the country to bring down workplace injuries but not here in Alberta because this government won't let it.

This year in particular, Mr. Speaker, the government's failure to work in good faith with its own unions' health and safety representatives resulted in correctional officers at the Remand Centre going on a wildcat strike over unsafe working conditions. The government's response: firing workers and bringing in the most antidemocratic legislation this province has seen in decades.

Mr. Speaker, if we are truly going to recognize the Albertans killed and injured at work, we owe it to them to do our job as legislators. That means extending occupational health and safety protection to farm workers, ensuring that we have enough officials to enforce workplace safety laws, providing a vehicle for workers to keep themselves safe, and listening to the concerns of those working people when they raise them. That and only that is how we honour the memories of the many workers who have been killed or seriously injured at work in the past year.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. minister for his comments today on the upcoming day of mourning. With about 55 per cent of the citizens of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo being either directly or indirectly involved in the oil sands industry, our residents do have a strong focus on safety, both on the job site and in their everyday lives, yet accidents still occur.

In fact, this past Sunday our community received the devastating news that it had lost a loved one in a tragic workplace accident, Mr. Shane Daye. As with other accidents and deaths that occur in my area, we make a concerted effort to contact the companies and try and establish what can be done for the families as well as to prevent future incidents. I did take the opportunity to speak with a Suncor representative, and the company has been deeply troubled by this horrible event. Suncor espouses a strong culture of employee safety with their journey to zero policy. They

express that workplace injuries are completely unacceptable, and they're doing everything in their ability to find out why this accident happened in order to prevent future injuries. I offer my sincerest condolences to the family as well as to our greater community for this shocking loss.

Mr. Speaker, we're all strongly impacted by this and other events, and on April 28, the day of mourning, we are reminded that everybody needs to be vigilant regarding safety in the workplace. It is imperative that everyone – workers, family members, industry, and government – recognize that we all have a role to play in protecting workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, I beg your indulgence to allow me to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests to recognize a group of students who have travelled a long way to be here and have an equally long trip back to make it there before dark. Does anyone object to reverting to a brief intro?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake, please.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, and thank you to the Assembly. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 26 fabulous students from my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The school is St. Dominic in Cold Lake. It's a pleasure that they're here today. Their teacher is Mr. Benoit Côté, who happens to be the hon. Member from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley's son-in-law. I would ask all the students from St. Dom and the parents and the teachers to stand up – you can rise – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Very briefly, the hon. Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Wei Liu, program administrator with University of Alberta International, which supports the global academic leadership development program. This exciting program, sponsored by the China Scholarship Council, selects administrators from universities across China to study at the U of A for three months and exposes them to Canadian university administration practices. Ninety university administrators from 35 universities have participated in this program since 2012. The scholarship council actually said that the U of A received the highest number of these participants in the world. We're joined today by Mr. Wei, who is also joined by Mr. Xiaobing Lin, interpreter and PhD student at the U of A. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask these two members to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I have one more introduction to make. Joining us today are also 38 senior administrators from a wide range of faculties such as medicine, economics, engineering, cultural studies, and resources and environment representing 21 universities across China. They're here, actually, to develop crosscultural understanding of education and to foster innovative

new capacities. I'm going to ask you to stand as I mention the university: Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University; University of Electronic Science and Technology of China; Southwest Jiaotong University; Ocean University of China; Southeast University; Sichuan University; Central China Normal University; Shaanxi Normal University; Shanghai International Studies University; Anhui Agricultural University; Liaoning University; Zhejiang University; Central China Normal University; Lanzhou University, science and engineering; Guangxi University; Beijing University; Hunan University of Science and Technology; Harbin Normal University; Jilin University; Changchun University of Science and Technology; and No. 3 Military Medical University. Please give them the warm welcome of the House.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let's jump straight in, please, starting with the official Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Budget Documents

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we have several of this government's former Finance ministers condemning the budget that was passed yesterday. Now the Auditor General has joined them. Yesterday he told the Public Accounts Committee, "It would be best for Albertans to have a budget presented before the start of the year, in the same way that the actual results will be presented." He made it clear that the budget currently does not follow basic accounting rules and that it should. Will the Premier order the Finance minister to take the advice of the Auditor General?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that isn't exactly what the Auditor General said yesterday. It's unfortunate that the opposition wants to put it in that context.

I want to be very clear that the Alberta government's financial statements follow public-sector accounting principles, and the consolidated surplus-deficit calculation that we do is the same consolidated surplus-deficit calculation the federal government uses and most other jurisdictions that follow public-sector accounting rules and principles.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of whether we use the consolidated constructed system, which the Auditor General likes, which is what we're building for the end of the year anyway, the numbers stay the same.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was exactly what the Auditor General said. That's why I quoted it.

Also yesterday the assistant deputy minister of Finance stated this. "The budget is a policy choice of government. A government of the day could choose to move to a budget that's based on a financial statements basis at some point in the future. That has not been the choice of [this] government." His point was clear. This government intentionally adopted this deceptive budget presentation. The Auditor General thinks the time wasted on interpreting the budget would be better spent on debating the government's fiscal policy. Why won't the government take the advice of the Auditor General?

Mr. Horner: Well, actually, I do agree with the Auditor General's assertion that this time that we're spending debating the format of what is a policy document does take away from the time that we could be spending talking about fiscal discipline and the fact that we are building Alberta. We're using the resources at hand to do exactly what Albertans have asked us to do. We are saving for the

future, Mr. Speaker, we are building for tomorrow, and we are making sure that we are living in a fiscally responsible province, with the strongest balance sheet, according to Standard & Poor's, the credit-rating agency, of any jurisdiction in the country.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General was blunt on this topic. The Finance minister would do well to read the *Hansard* on it. He was comfortable enough to go on the record and make his viewpoint known. This government isn't fooling him, and they certainly aren't fooling Albertans. Albertans know that they are running a multibillion dollar consolidated cash deficit and that by the time of the next election we will have \$21 billion worth of debt. Why won't this government come clean with Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Well, you know, I would really appreciate it if the hon. Leader of the Opposition would come clean as well in the sense that she's talking about consolidated financial statements not in the way the public-sector accounting principles would apply but in the way that she would do her chequebook, Mr. Speaker. That's not the way \$40 billion corporations manage themselves. It's not the way that the federal government manage themselves. To follow that logic, the federal government doesn't have a \$2.9 billion deficit. They've got a hundred billion dollar deficit. I'm sure the Prime Minister would be pleased to understand that the Wildrose believes that they are lying about their financial situation, too.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions.

FOIP Request Process

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General isn't the only independent officer this government is ignoring. They're also refusing to take the Information Commissioner's advice while shamelessly claiming that she endorses their political interference in the freedom of information process. As the CBC reported yesterday, PC political staff were involved in delaying the release of FOIP requests. Can the Premier please explain how the Health minister's press secretary could legitimately know in December that a FOIP document was going to be released in February?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise. As I've said previously, this government is delivering unprecedented transparency in Alberta. We're doing that not only through the gold standard expense disclosure policy and the gold standard salary disclosure policy; we are also doing a review of the FOIP Act.

Now, with respect to the issue that was raised by the hon. member, I understand a letter has been sent to the Privacy Commissioner, and that's the appropriate forum for that to be reviewed.

Ms Smith: I'll try again, Mr. Speaker. The CBC report clearly shows that the Health minister's communications staff was strategizing a political response to an embarrassing freedom of information request almost two months before it would be released. They also show that the minister's staff was made aware of who asked for it, a clear violation of the privacy laws. To the Premier: how can Albertans trust the information that comes out when his government's political operatives are intercepting it before it goes public?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the FOIP legislation – I hope the members across the way read it – it says that the head of the public body, which would be the minister in this case, has the authority for releasing the FOIP request. The head of the public body, in this case the minister, has the ability to delegate that authority to somebody else but has ultimate responsibility to review the material. There's also in the FOIP legislation the requirement that the third party whose information is going to be released be consulted, which is why Health had the opportunity to review it, and the minister delegated somebody to check it.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we were told that they should only review it five days in advance – this was two months in advance – and you're not supposed to know who requested the information. Both are in clear violation.

This government refuses to uphold basic tenets of transparency. Their interference in the freedom of information process just goes to show that there is no line too far for them to cross if it means protecting their political interests and saving their scandal-plagued party from further embarrassment. To the Premier. This is the legacy of the party that he's going to hand over to his new leader in September. What is he going to do to correct it?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, time and time again we have heard the members talk about vetting and about reviewing and about interfering, yet all we've seen so far is a minister who had the authority under the legislation to review what material was going to be released, which is, quite frankly, his obligation in the protection of people's privacy as well. It's his obligation to do so. That's all that happened. If they ever could demonstrate where any interference came, besides looking at the material to make sure that Albertans were protected, I'd like to see them table it.

The Speaker: Third and final main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Happy to, Minister.

Yesterday I was asked why an everyday Albertan should care about the government interfering in the freedom of information process. Well, let me tell you why. Several months ago the Alberta Federation of Labour put in a FOIP request for the government's calculations to justify their pension changes. The Finance department promised the information by March 10. That information is now 43 days late. In the next few days we are all expected to make decisions on this topic while the government is suppressing this information. To the Finance minister: what is going on in his department?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it specifically lays out why requests can take longer than 30 days in the legislation under section 14. Some of those are when large volumes of data are being requested, when they have to be specially reviewed by a third party.

Mr. Speaker, it's important for everyone to understand that FOIP requests just in the last two years from elected officials, particularly across the way, have increased by almost 500 per cent. Our FOIP individuals who are working on this do it as quickly as they can, as efficiently, as effectively as possible, but given the volume of requests sometimes they do have to ask for extensions.

2:10

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Federation of Labour paid the \$6,200 fee for the information, and they still aren't getting it. There's really only one conclusion as to why the government

doesn't want this information out. They based their entire argument about the planned pension changes on the premise that the plans are unsustainable. What if that isn't true and these documents prove it? To the Finance minister: doesn't he realize that by delaying the release of this information, it makes it look like he's got something to hide?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, at Public Accounts the other day the chair of Public Accounts, the hon. Member for Airdrie, heard the officials in my department talk about some thousand scenarios that they have run based on the different scenarios that you can operate with: the mortality rates, the discount rates, the contributions, all of those sorts of things. My understanding is that they are actively working on providing that information. But as the hon. Minister of Service Alberta has rightly pointed out, this is a fairly significant amount of data that we are putting together to ensure that the competitive . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: A simple solution, then, Mr. Speaker: slow the legislation down until you can table the reports.

It comes down to this, Mr. Speaker. The freedom of information process exists to prevent the government from suppressing and hiding damaging information about their mistakes. The process must work free of political interference, but in the last two days alone we've seen several examples that it doesn't. The AFL, the opposition parties, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation have all had their freedom requests interfered with. The credibility and the integrity of government information is at stake. What will the Premier do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I pointed out before, a near 500 per cent increase in the volume of FOIP requests from elected officials across the way has really got everyone bogged down trying to meet all the requests. That's what the delays are caused by.

If we want to talk about transparency, I would challenge the members across the way, if they're so embracing transparency, to release to the public on a website all of the requests they've made, all of the money they've asked to be waived so that taxpayers pay for their FOIP requests, what types of requests they've made, and let Albertans see that some members have requested very frivolous, expensive FOIP requests that waste time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Bitumen Extraction Resumption Approval

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An oil company has had repeated leaks of bitumen over a period of time from wells in the same area. All sites continue to leak uncontrolled every day, some contaminating groundwater. They don't know what is causing it, and neither does Alberta Environment. They don't know how to stop it, and neither does Alberta Environment. So let me get this straight. The Alberta regulator has allowed this company to restart, using the same process in the same place but a little further away and with a little less pressure. To the minister of the environment: why is the minister letting the department stand by while this company is allowed to perpetrate this insanity all over again?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This would fall under the Alberta Energy Regulator. If the company has met the requirements of the Alberta Energy Regulator, they can continue to do business.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Back to the same minister. Now, the company says that the problem is faulty well bores. Scientists say that there is a change in the geological formation and that as far back as 2001 more than 250 wells failed in that area due to geological shear stress generated by steaming operations, yet the government is going to allow the same company to continue steam pressure. Why won't the minister stop this resumption until the research is in and subject to peer and public review?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Regulator's approval to resume steaming operations at the Primrose site has strings attached to it. These operations must be at least one kilometre from the restricted area and use lower injection volumes and have improved monitoring protocols. There are rules in place for this to happen.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, my. Well, the latest reports show this particular company had 33 high-risk enforcements, of which 12 are for persistent noncompliance, in just 18 months, but very few fines or noncompliance fees have been allocated, so I'd say that it was a pretty high-risk group to be allowing to reopen wells in an area that seems prone to leaks. Once again, what is the minister's tolerance threshold for noncompliance? For everyone else in the world it's three strikes and you're out.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have taken our jobs very seriously when dealing with the company that the hon. member across the way is talking about. We have filed charges under the environmental protection act against this company. If they meet the requirements and they continue to do the work that has to be done in a responsible manner, we'll continue to let them operate.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

Public Service Pension Plan Amendment Bill

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government's attacks on the pensions of Albertans are being pushed through without adequate consultation. The advice of pension boards, who are responsible for administering the pension plans, has been more or less ignored. In short, this government is riding roughshod over public employees, retirees, and experts alike. My question is to the Finance minister. Why don't you pause, consult with Albertans properly, and reconsider your present course of action?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this sounds strangely like a motion that was introduced in the House last night on Bill 9, which we spoke

to and on which I actually adjourned the debate last night. We have taken stock of what all of the pension boards have told us around the sustainability issue that they have. We've also listened to experts in the field, including the Auditor General and others from other jurisdictions, who have told us in no uncertain terms that to do nothing is the wrong thing to do, that we need to do something to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of those pensions.

Mr. Mason: Well, do something, do anything, but why don't you talk to Albertans and give Albertans a voice in the decision before you make that decision. It's clear that opposition to Bill 9 is strong and widespread. Many expert voices have challenged the government's rationale for these changes. To the Finance minister: why won't you support the NDP efforts to refer Bill 9 to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future so MLAs can hear from experts and the public alike before voting on the bill?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did speak to this last night, and I would encourage folks to read *Hansard* and my comments to that at about 11:05 last night. I would also say that there has been across the globe numerous experts talking about defined benefit pension plans. Eighty per cent of Albertans do not have a defined benefit plan, and as I said last night, that's a concern for this government. That's a concern for many governments in North America. That's why this government introduced pooled registered pension plans. That's why this government wants to talk about CPP with the federal government . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, the minister forgets to mention that a previous Minister of Finance put an end to previous attempts to bring about pension reform for all Canadians. This government is complicit in that decision. It may have changed its mind now, but the fact of the matter is that this government derailed plans for adequate pensions for all Albertans. Albertans are trying to speak up on this issue, Mr. Minister, and the government is deaf. Why won't you withdraw Bill 9, consult with Albertans, and let your next leader decide the course of action for your party?

Mr. Horner: It's rather interesting, Mr. Speaker. This party says that I should listen to previous Finance ministers, and that party says that I shouldn't listen to previous Finance ministers. How about we listen to this Finance minister? One, we are concerned about all Albertans' retirement, and we are encouraging ways for Albertans to save for their retirement. Two, what we are doing for those employees of government, not for all Albertans because it doesn't apply to all Albertans, is protecting defined benefit pensions for the future, the past, and the present.

Emergency Turnarounds on Highways

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, emergency professionals from across the province have expressed an issue concerning the lack of emergency turnarounds on our Alberta highways. I've been told that due to inefficient turnarounds on Alberta's highways and freeways emergency vehicles are often forced to make these direction changes on bridges and overpasses rather than on the roadway itself, and this has become a safety concern. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the current standard used in the design and construction of Alberta's roadways for emergency

vehicles, and what would be the cost to increase these access points on existing roadways?

2:20

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty detailed question to answer in 30 seconds, but I'll give it a try. Emergency vehicles should always turn around under safe conditions. There are all kinds of different options for turning around. We do have crossroads in certain areas, but we can't put a turnaround every kilometre on our highways. It would just be way too expensive. Also, those intersections cause more accidents. If the member would like, he could come to my office, and I could give him a more detailed explanation.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Minister. I'll do that.

To the same minister: given that the government is utilizing P3s for their new road construction, can you advise if there is a different standard used by these contractors than would be recommended by traffic standards Canada?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if I follow that one. The only P3s we're building in road construction are the ring roads, and the design and standards are the same standards and design we use to build all of our roads in this province. I'm not sure what he's talking about.

Mr. Webber: To the same minister: given that several Alberta emergency services have indicated an inability to shorten their response times due to this issue, what is your department willing to do to change the existing roads?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, again I'm having trouble following that. We do have our standard intersections and off-ramps on these ring roads. Like I said, we can't put more intersections on our freeways because that creates another safety hazard that's probably far worse than the one the member is talking about.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 9, 2012, the Wildrose submitted a FOIP request to AHS for the expenses of former health executives. These should have been returned within a few months, but instead AHS took at least six separate extensions. Six months later they were only partially released. Meanwhile political staff in the minister's office had full access to the records. The minister himself was briefed. He knew not only the contents of the FOIP but also who was requesting the records two full months before the records were made public. To the Minister of Health: were your political staff at all involved in requesting or ensuring the numerous extensions in releasing this information?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, under FOIP section 14(1) it says, "The head of a public body," meaning the minister or his designate, "may extend the time for responding to a request for up to 30 days . . . with the Commissioner's permission" for a list of extenuating circumstances like the applicant doesn't give enough detail, there isn't enough time, or it's a complex issue. These requests were granted with the permission of the commissioner. I don't see what the issue is here.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, there's an issue.

Given that records show that on at least three different occasions our FOIP requests identified the applicant either as an opposition party, an elected official, or a political source and given that at least on one of these occasions information was unnecessarily withheld by someone within Alberta Health, how can the minister expect anyone to believe that his office has not politicized the freedom of information process?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, the FOIP Act is very clear. FOIP requests cannot be politicized. Ministers have the responsibility to fulfill the requests for FOIP. They have the personal responsibility as the minister or they can delegate and designate someone else. The requests have been fulfilled. There's no other issue here.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right. Let's try this one. For the last three years we have requested and have received the AHS capital submission outlining their infrastructure needs and, more importantly, the risk of not approving these projects, yet when we made the exact same request this year, for the first time ever – ever – the risks of the nonapproval messaging was completely removed. To the minister of accountability: do ministers routinely withhold information for no other reason than being embarrassed by your government?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, Alberta has an excellent record of responding to FOIP requests. Of the 4,200 FOIP requests in the last fiscal year, 90 per cent were responded to within 30 days, and 96 per cent were responded to within 60 days. We're conducting a review of the act to make it even better, and that work is ongoing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Public Safety in Bonnyville-Cold Lake

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipal officials in my constituency have been contacting me about the reduction of RCMP officers in their communities. As many of you know, the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area is booming, with more people living in our communities, more people on our roads, and, unfortunately, more crime. To the Minister of Justice: why are policing levels being reduced in communities that I represent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm pleased to get that question from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I can advise her that actually no RCMP positions have been reduced in her area. In fact, earlier this year we announced that we would be increasing the number of RCMP officers by 40. That's an investment of \$5.9 million. Of course, that will be decided by the RCMP commanding officers in Edmonton. If this member would like me to connect her with the RCMP, as they do operate independently, I would be happy to do so. It's part of our common-sense, conservative justice policies.

Mrs. Leskiw: I'm pleased to hear that, Minister, and you can count on me connecting with you on that.

Given that communities in my constituency are growing and that we see more dangerous driving on our highways with people speeding, texting, and drinking and driving, when are you going to get tough on these offences?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think each of the offences that she mentions is serious. I want to remind all members of this Assembly and anybody who happens to be watching that we have brought in stronger drunk-driving legislation, stronger distracted-driving legislation, which we are reviewing. As well, we also passed Motion 504 I believe it was last week for higher fines on traffic violations. I think we should look at that, but I do think that seizing vehicles for excessive speed is going too far.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Transportation. Do you have data to suggest that these new laws are making an impact?

Mr. Drysdale: Indeed they are, Mr. Speaker. In the year and a half since Alberta's distracted-driving legislation came into force, almost 50,000 people were convicted of distracted driving. Awareness of this legislation is high. A 2012 survey observed that fewer drivers are using cellphones while behind the wheel, a drop from 11.7 per cent in 2007 to 1.4 per cent in 2012. In the first six months of tougher sanctions on impaired drivers we saw a 46 per cent decrease in the number of alcohol-related fatalities compared to the five-year average.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Mrs. Towle: Serious concerns have been raised regarding the integrity of the freedom of information process and political interference by this government. The associate minister of transparency has shown that he does not understand his own portfolio. He remains confused on FOIP legislation and has clearly not read section 40 of the FOIP Act. Does the minister not understand section 40 of the FOIP Act, which clearly states that the actions of the former Deputy Premier are not in compliance with this legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Scott: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I said, there are remedies under the act if somebody has a concern about the act. That includes sections 53 and 65. I understand that steps have been taken in that regard.

One point that I do want to make about the FOIP Act, that I think is important for the opposition to understand, is that it does cost money to react to a FOIP request. In the last year the government of Alberta spent about \$9.5 million responding to 4,200 access requests. Of the \$9.5 million, after fee waivers only about \$100,000 was recovered by the government of Alberta. It's important to make sure that we have the right balance, Mr. Speaker, between access and protecting privacy.

Mrs. Towle: Goldy, this is embarrassing.

Given that this associate minister doesn't even know his own FOIP legislation and given that there is less transparency and more political interference than ever, Mr. Speaker, the government is going into debt paying for a gold-standard, do-nothing ministry. Will this associate minister step down, dissolve his ministry, and be the first member of this PC government to actually save taxpayers some money?

2:30

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I have personally witnessed the minister of transparency work very diligently on many pieces of

legislation like salary disclosure. He has spent over a year working on consultations on the FOIP review to make sure that the act continues to improve and remains the gold standard across the country. I will continue to support this minister and the work that he does for the benefit of Albertans, from one end of this province to the other.

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows this was a made-up ministry.

Given that \$260,000 could be used – here's a thought – buying dialysis machines for everyday Albertans so they don't have to travel for treatment, will this minister admit that he does nothing of value; step down; and stop wasting taxpayer dollars on himself, extra political staffers, car allowances, and all the other fun stuff that comes with his do-nothing ministry?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy from the Wildrose opposition astounds me every single day. First, they say that we're not protecting people's privacy and releasing information enough, and then they say that the entire ministry is frivolous. Well, protecting privacy and releasing information are critically important. I wonder, with millions of dollars spent on FOIP requests and given the fact that we have almost a 500 per cent increase in FOIP requests coming from those opposition members, which wastes people's energy, how many dialysis machines their wild goose chases could have paid for.

Childhood Immunization

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in the third quarter AHS reported that in southern Alberta 22 per cent of children were not vaccinated for measles, mumps, and rubella and that 42 per cent were not vaccinated against tetanus, whooping cough, and polio. Jurisdictions such as Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba all require students to be vaccinated before they attend school. All 50 states require the same. To the Associate Minister of Wellness: will Alberta have children that attend our schools have their shots to protect themselves and our society from these life-threatening diseases?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. This is obviously a very, very important issue, especially for those whose families are dealing with this right now. He may or may not know that we have 20 confirmed cases in Alberta: eight in Calgary, seven in central, and five in Edmonton. Directly related to the question, there's a new case of measles here in town, including an infant under 12 months old, and I just want to point this out. This highlights the importance of immunization as a means of protecting vulnerable Albertans, and I encourage all Albertans to go to Health Link for more information and to get immunized.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that answer and \$1.64 gets me a cup of coffee at Tim Hortons, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister. Many schools in this province do not even allow peanuts in their schools due to the deadly consequences that could arise. Well, the same can be true if a child has not been vaccinated. If a parent cannot send a child to school with a peanut, why can they send a kid that has not been vaccinated to school, potentially causing an outbreak and a risk to public health?

Mr. Rodney: As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, under the Public Health Act students and staff at schools or child care facilities who have been exposed to measles and are susceptible to measles are required to stay home. They are required to stay home for a period of five days after first exposure through 21 days after the last exposure to measles. I can give you more in the next answer.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that's fabulous. The minister is doing something after the fact. What I'm asking him is to do something, be proactive to protect our society.

Given that Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and all 50 states require vaccinations for kids to attend school, will this government follow the lead of these jurisdictions, who have implemented policies that have science, common sense, and reason behind them, to protect kids and protect our society?

Mr. Rodney: Everything that we do in health and wellness is science based and evidence based. We normally carry about 15,000 doses of MMR vaccine as a three-month supply, but we've ramped it up and currently have about 90,000 doses. Please visit pharmacists and doctors and others to check into this. It's widely accessible. The current routine childhood program includes two doses of MMR at 12 months and at kindergarten ages. An additional 3,000 Albertans were immunized with the MMR vaccine in January and February of this year alone.

Women's Issues

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, yesterday a national research report confirmed what many women in this province already know. Based on measures of health, pay, leadership, and education for women Calgary and Edmonton ranked third-last and last across the country. Women in these cities earned between \$17,000 and \$21,000 a year less than men. To the minister responsible for the status of women in Alberta – oh, right; we're the only province without one. To the jobs minister: why does your PC government do nothing while women's equality in Alberta lags further and further behind?

Ms Jansen: I'd like to thank the member for this question and perhaps point out the fact, Mr. Speaker, that I have women's issues in my portfolio. I'm not sure if you knew that. One of the things I think is important to mention is that preliminary work has been undertaken by this government in developing a women's equality and advancement framework. I'm not sure if you know about that, but we had made the announcement, and it's certainly out there. I would be delighted to give you all of the details.

Mr. Bilous: Well, that's fabulous, Mr. Speaker. I wonder how quickly that's closing the income gap.

Given that now we're fighting to keep Alberta pensions safe from this PC government and given that women make up 70 per cent of public pension plan members, will the Minister of Finance admit that his attacks on pensions are only going to roll back gender equality in this province further and further?

Mr. Horner: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what this Finance minister will tell the hon. member is that what we are doing is protecting the future incomes of those women and men who are working in the public sector for the government of Alberta or in municipalities. If you do nothing, like other jurisdictions, New Brunswick and PEI, in the years past, then you will be facing a situation in the future where those individuals may actually see their pension promise reduced. That's exactly what we are trying to avoid by taking action today. That's leadership.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A reduction of benefits is a decrease in pay there, Mr. Minister.

Given that addressing gender inequality isn't just about encouraging words or celebrating a day and given that this government has failed to deliver on things like full-day kindergarten and child care, that would remove barriers to full-time employment for women, back to the minister of jobs and employment: why hasn't your government done anything to reduce barriers to full-time employment for women?

Ms Jansen: Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. You know, we have vital work that we need to do in this province. This government has recognized that we need to do that work. The women's equality and advancement framework proposes focused actions against a number of themes: violence against women and girls, women's economic security and prosperity, women's leadership in the democratic process, women's health and well-being, and women's legal and educational rights. We're working on that now. It is a priority for us, and we are delighted to be able to do this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

North West Upgrader Project

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that, like most governments, this out-of-touch PC one is no better at picking corporate winners than any of the others. Can you say world-class magnesium plant? Currently we have high hopes that the North West upgrader will be a home run, but we know its costs are spiralling. Originally budgeted at \$5.7 billion, revised in December 2013 by over 50 per cent to \$8.5 billion, it's behind schedule and over budget. Could the minister please advise us how much in total the government is on the hook for?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

2:40

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission they have entered into a commercial agreement with, I believe, CNRL and North West Upgrading. The first original terms of that, I believe, were around \$350 million, which APMC is financing with CNRL and North West Upgrading. The important piece here is that this is an upgrader that will produce diesel in the province of Alberta. As the hon. member knows, in his jurisdiction there are times when we're short diesel in this province. I think this is a very valuable investment by the people of Alberta and partners . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Bikman: No disagreement on the need for more diesel fuel, Mr. Minister.

Given that significant Alberta taxpayer resources have been committed to this project, would the minister tell us what requirements there are that specify that Alberta suppliers will be used wherever and whenever practical?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the interest of ensuring that Alberta taxpayers get the best value, we are not going to place conditions on the construction that may not allow that to happen. I am certain that there are a number of suppliers and manufacturers in our province who are sharpening their pencils because of a very

large, very important project happening right in our province. Certainly, we encourage local, and we want to see local, but we are a market-based economy, and we're a market-based government. I'm sure the hon. members opposite would agree.

Mr. Bikman: Given that Alberta has world-class steel fabricators, as you've mentioned, doing outstanding work, will the minister tell us why components easily built by manufacturers here in total cost-effectiveness have been outsourced to offshore companies, given that some components reportedly had to be reworked once they got here because things like pressure-weld quality was substandard?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think government should be involved in the day-to-day business decisions of a corporation, nor do I think that the Wildrose – oh, no. I forgot. They no longer have ideology as of last night.

An Hon. Member: It's not what it's cracked up to be.

Mr. Horner: It's not what it's cracked up to be. That's what it was.

Mr. Speaker, we don't get involved in the day-to-day details of the bid process of a private corporation. We're watching our investment. We're making sure that that investment is secure through the financial management of that corporation. Obviously, if there is some good value to be had, I'm sure the corporation is going to go after that value.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Victims of Crime

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government recently introduced a Victims Bill of Rights that seeks to transform the criminal justice system by creating at the federal level clear rights for victims of crime. This is good news for crime victims across the province but raises the question as to what Alberta is doing in this respect. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Can you assure my constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods and all Albertans that this government will protect the victims of crime in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for that question. I want to assure this member and all members of this House that Alberta Justice always has the goal of putting victims first. I was very happy to see the federal government table this new Victims Bill of Rights on April 3, 2014. The rights of victims are at the forefront whenever we want to be dealing with any matters to do with the criminal justice system. To put it on the record, Alberta Justice supports the federal Victims Bill of Rights. I'm looking forward to working with the federal minister to implement this and see how we can improve the rights of victims.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: can the minister stand in the House and assure my constituents that steps were taken to ensure that the victims of crime in Alberta were represented while the federal government was drafting this legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. There was quite a bit of consultation, particularly at our federal-provincial-territorial Justice ministers' meetings, on this particular topic. We have written the federal government many times dealing with the rights of victims, but the most important one that we've talked about is reducing the need for preliminary inquiries. This can get very technical, but in layperson's terms, this would limit the number of times that a victim has to face the accused and testify, something that I think is very important. It would also help resolve cases more quickly. So we will continue advancing this as part of our common-sense, conservative approach to justice.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: how is this government moving to ensure that as many burdens as possible are removed for the victims of crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This government introduced a victims of crime fund, where money from surcharges on fines is put into the fund for victims of crime. This year the Premier and I just announced \$9.1 million worth of new funding for 41 community police-based programs. What does this mean? This helps Albertans affected by criminal acts, including domestic violence, elder abuse, assault, and sexual exploitation. Some have even called it the gold standard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Disaster Recovery Program Administration

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the Ministry of Municipal Affairs admitted that only \$48 million in DRP spending has been approved by LandLink and received by Albertans attempting to rebuild after the flood. This week we learned that \$87 million was spent on underutilized temporary shelters. Now, we understand that there was some need for temporary shelters, but this government doesn't seem to understand the disconnect between the dismissal of handing out millions of dollars in contracts while ensuring that everyday Albertans have to fight tooth and nail for any dollar from the DRP program. How can the minister justify nickel and diming everyday Albertans while blindly handing over millions in sole-sourced contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, those folks in the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, and I understand that you have to front-load in an emergency. You have to make sure that there are enough supplies to meet the demand. Simply, there were a hundred thousand people affected by this flood, 15,000 homes affected, and we wanted to make sure that nobody was left out in the cold as we approached the winter months. It was appropriate planning. We did our best, and we continue to work hard.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, during budget estimates it was revealed that LandLink has billed taxpayers over \$18 million to nickel and dime Albertans most impacted by the flood. As of a few weeks ago those thousands of victims that the member just referred to have received a total of \$48 million to help them rebuild. Again,

LandLink gets \$18 million; everyday residents, \$48 million. Can the minister help me understand this, please?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, again, who's nickel and diming here? It's this member when he talks about the civil servants in the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. What I can tell you is that these people served in Afghanistan. They're former police officers. They're former paramedics. They're part of our Canadian military that head up that agency. It's just disrespectful that this member would come out and say that they're nickel and diming people in High River. I can tell you that right now the mayor in High River is very supportive of this government in terms of what we've done. He said that everything we've done is appropriate and that we've spent the money well for the taxpayers.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, given that in estimates it was revealed that LandLink may be able to bill taxpayers upwards of another \$13 million to close the outstanding 275 appeals from the flood and given that LandLink has been advised that their contract will not be renewed once these appeals are closed, how can the minister assure Albertans that the money will flow to the flood victims as opposed to the coffers of this private company?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, again, we all recognize that this is the worst natural disaster in Canadian history. Ten months after this flood people are moving back into their homes. We've seen a decrease down to 300 people in these temporary neighbourhoods. That means the work that we're doing is actually in fact working. What I can tell you also is that all of this is applicable under the federal DRP. This money is coming back to Alberta through the federal government and their \$2.8 million commitment to this province. I can tell you that everybody is working together. Ten months after the flood we're doing our best for Albertans. We're doing it with them, for them, and beside them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Government Data Security

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rightfully, a lot of attention has been paid to the protection of government-managed information. In fact, this Legislature has implemented many pieces of legislation that have addressed it. However, the protection of information and data is only as secure as the system's weakest link, the protocols established, and the ready responses in place. We cannot simply legislatively protect the front door when our data and information are exposed at the back door. Risk must be managed and incidents responded to. To the Minister of Service Alberta: does Alberta have effective province-wide IT security measures in place?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I can attest that the Department of Service Alberta has a very vigorous set of information security management directives that set the minimum standards for all departments, yet every department still goes through and can raise those standards for any sort of nuances that they may require in order to make sure that they have protected data in their systems. But we never presume that we are perfect. We constantly are vigorous in making sure that we're updating those standards and are securing the data sets that are so critical to keep private within our departments.

Mr. Young: Given the 2011 world-wide RSA token recall due to the associate algorithms being compromised, has the province of Alberta recalled the compromised RSA tokens and continued to use two-factor authentication for access to provincial systems?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our provider for those tokens, EMC, advised us about the security breach. My understanding is that they had advised us that they didn't have to recall any of those tokens. They, in fact, enhanced their security systems and gave us the same protocol so that we could enhance ours. We didn't need to recall those systems, and we continue to be vigilant.

2:50

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: has a risk profile for systems been established, and have users, developers, system managers, contractors, or otherwise undergone required screening certifications through the established national RCMP standards for security clearances?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I already mentioned our information security management directives that apply to all departments, but our security protocols that are in place in every department are very standard as well. So if it's a government employee that's going to be handling sensitive material, we have a security and background check for them, but any company that's doing work that's going to affect secure data or sensitive data or sensitive data systems also has to prove that they have gone through the same sort of security protocol check.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Electric System Operator's announcement last week caused the electricity forward and futures market to spike immediately. Alberta consumers are now going to pay 30 to 40 per cent more as a result of this price spike. On Tuesday the minister said that prices have not gone up yet. Does this minister not understand how price spikes in the forward and futures markets are passed on to consumers, and can she explain this lack of understanding?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I said the other day was – and I'm glad to see the member has another question today and has negotiated that with his party – with regard to: in January we had some price increases, and then in February and March they had gone down, and in April, right now, it's at \$7, and it's the lowest that it has been in months. That is exactly what I said the other day.

Mr. Anglin: Let's see if we can get you to actually answer a question.

Given that the Market Surveillance Administrator recently reported that economic withholding caused electricity prices to rise and given that the minister so far will not answer questions about economic withholding, can the minister explain to Albertans

and to this Assembly what economic withholding is, and how does this benefit consumers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If there are any issues with regard to any of the electricity system, the MSA has the opportunity, if there is any anticompetitive behaviour, to bring those forward and bring them over to the AUC. We have independent bodies to make sure that our consumers in Alberta are protected. If things are brought forward, that means that the independent bodies are doing the job and that the system is working.

Mr. Anglin: Can't sell it, can you?

Can the minister explain to consumers why their utility bills have gone up so fast, and can she assure them it won't get worse?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, I will say it again, and I will say it slower. We have seen that in January the prices were higher. In February and March and April now of this year, April being the lowest we've seen in months – if you don't like the fluctuations as Albertans, and we want to make sure the consumers are protected, we have plans in place so that they can have an amount, that they would know each month what that is. I'd be happy to answer that question over and over and over for the member until he actually gets it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for question period has elapsed. We have considerable business to do under the Routine yet, and the Government House Leader's eye has caught my attention.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that we waive 7(7) and continue with the daily Routine past 3 o'clock.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader has asked for consent to proceed with this business of Routine until we complete it, which takes us past 3 o'clock probably. Does anybody object to that?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us proceed. We will go straight on with the next item.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Let us begin with the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Canadian Search Dog Association

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we celebrated National Volunteer Week across the country, and I'd like to take the opportunity to speak today about a wonderful organization that serves my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock as well as the Edmonton and Alberta and Canada areas.

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting Chris Kaulbars and Soleil, a female German shepherd, when we attended an event in Legal. Chris and Soleil are members of the Canadian Search Dog Association and are based out of Edmonton. This Canadian Search Dog Association is a provincial nonprofit group of dedicated individuals who volunteer their time, energy, and resources to train search workers and search dogs to aid the RCMP in searches

for lost or missing persons and/or evidence. They are ready to respond 24 hours a day.

Not only do their members spend hundreds of hours training for searches; they also volunteer their time and knowledge to assist others. Through a program called the adventure smart program they teach young people what to do to help themselves should they ever become lost in the woods.

At various events the public gets an opportunity to get up close and personal with these incredible dogs, and their handlers can answer questions and maybe even do demonstrations if the venues allow it. If schedules permit, dogs and their handlers may be able to visit schools, Scout groups, or organizations to talk about CSDA.

I'd like to use a particular quote from their website that sums up the organization perfectly. "We are volunteers. We do this for our communities, for the challenge and for the opportunity to put our training to good use for the benefit of others. We do this for the love of working with our dogs." There is no doubt that it can be fun, but a search is a real, life-and-death situation that demands a level of care, competence, and professionalism equal to that of a paid professional.

For anyone who would like more information about this wonderful volunteer organization or to donate, please visit www.canadiansearchdogs.com.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. All-terrain vehicles are firing up across the province. This government likes to talk prevention but does not invest in prevention. Helmets prevent injuries, plain and simple. We expect another 20 all-terrain vehicle related deaths this year according to the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research. Sadly, the trend is increasing, not decreasing.

When a child turns 14, they can drive a car only with an adult present, but when a child can reach the handlebars of an ATV, there's nothing stopping them from driving it alone. Alberta and the Yukon are the only provinces in Canada that do not require wearing a helmet when using an ATV and do not limit a child on the basis of age from operating one alone. The Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research cites that 41 per cent of all-terrain vehicle related deaths are caused by head injuries, and 80 per cent of those that died from a head injury were not wearing a helmet. Many of these deaths and the 781 ATV-related hospital admissions in 2008 could have been prevented.

Why is a helmet the law when operating a motorbike but not an all-terrain vehicle? Limiting children from operating these powerful machines is, Mr. Speaker, a no-brainer and strongly advocated by the Canadian Paediatric Society. This government in its own 2008 survey showed that 84 per cent of Albertans favour requiring helmets, but they have not moved on the issue. Twenty deaths per year and preventing 800 hospital visits a year should be a concern to a government whose hospital wait times and chronic overcapacity increase the risk and the cost to our public.

For this government it is time to establish helmet requirements and age restrictions for operating ATVs. Albertans have requested it. Experts and other provinces have supported this. Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to get off its butt and focus on prevention and safety.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Currie.

World Meningitis Day

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I proudly wear my burgundy ribbon lapel pin in support of World Meningitis Day and the many Canadians such as Shayne who, as we heard in the introduction from the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, have defeated the odds.

Meningitis is a rare, potentially serious infection caused by inflammation to the lining around the brain and the spinal cord. Bacterial meningitis is a risk to all of us, particularly children under the age of five and young adults. An estimated 1 out of 5 healthy teenagers and adults carry the bacteria that can cause meningitis without ever becoming ill, but for others infections can be much more serious. Symptoms can be similar to those of the flu, including fever, nausea, headaches, neck stiffness, sensitivity to light, drowsiness, and muscle and leg pain.

3:00

If not caught in time, Mr. Speaker, this disease can prove fatal within 24 to 48 hours. Immediate treatment is critical, which is why educating Albertans about the causes and symptoms of this disease is vital. Approximately 10 per cent of the individuals who contract the disease will die, and of those who survive, up to 1 in 5 suffer permanent disabilities such as hearing loss, neurological damage, and limb amputation. Meningitis is spread through close contact. The bacteria are spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing, and sharing eating utensils.

Mr. Speaker, on this day patient groups, health professionals, meningitis survivors, and families who are working to reduce the occurrence and impact of meningitis recognize World Meningitis Day. We hope to increase public awareness of meningitis and to promote better understanding of the disease.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lately there has been much discussion about curriculum redesign. I've been listening with great interest to the views of my colleagues across the way who criticize our math rankings. I hear about all the math experts who say that we are failing on this file. They say: more focus on the basics.

So who are the true experts, Mr. Speaker? Teachers. Teachers know that teaching numeracy is not about standard algorithms. Teachers know and understand that pedagogical standards are more far reaching than that. Our teachers know that sometimes a child needs to see and feel by using math manipulatives while others are able to abstractly compute but need the expert in their classroom to identify and differentiate for that student to apply and synthesize what they've learned.

Where do we really stand? Did we fail our kids in Alberta by not providing the basics, as the critics believe? Well, the 2012 PISA results showed that 96 per cent of 15-year-old students succeeded at answering ability questions in math, basic facts. Fortunately, I have a great deal of my own expertise that I can rely on to talk about curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment, and more. Mr. Speaker, I'm not one to overlook a problem or pretend that things are lovely when they aren't, and I think our opposition is barking up the wrong tree. It would seem to me that

if 96 per cent of our middle-school-aged students are showing success at answering the basic math questions on a PISA, then this is a pretty indisputable result.

Like I said, I'm not here to glaze over problems because I do believe there is work to do, but it isn't with rote memorization. That isn't what the data says to me. We need to prepare our students for a future in which they can evaluate by assessing theories, comparing ideas and outcomes, solving, and recommending. That is what we ought to be focusing our curriculum redesign on.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McAllister: From the member that advocated for no zeros, that was rich.

Hockey Marathon for Charity

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, what an honour it is for me to rise today and talk about the ultimate hockey game for charity, which is coming up in Chestermere. From May 4 through May 14 40 hockey players are going to attempt – and I'm sure they'll succeed – to set a new world record for the longest hockey game ever played. They do have some experience with this as well. It was many of these same players that set the current record of 246 hours just two years ago. Why are they doing it again, you ask? They are doing it for the kids. Last go-round they raised \$1.7 million for the Alberta Children's hospital. A big portion of that went to kids with cancer. This year they plan on breaking the \$2 million mark, and the proceeds will again go to the Alberta Children's hospital, the foundation for brain health. They will also help with flood relief in Alberta.

They have been training for months. Clearly, they have to. They play four-hour shifts, they take a break, and then they come back and play for four hours more. They will do that for 10-plus days. This is not just a physical challenge; it is very much a mental challenge, too.

The last time they did this, in fact, Mr. Speaker, one player with a broken foot hobbled to centre ice and spent his shift there, passing pucks so he could stay. Another needed dental work after getting a puck in the face. They can't leave the rink, though, so he got his stitches and, as they say in hockey terms, sucked it up until the end of the game. I could go on and on about their sacrifices. It's really impressive.

I also, though, Mr. Speaker, want to give a shout-out to the town of Chestermere for rolling out the welcome mat for these players and to everybody at the rec centre who is turning the arena into a home for everyone involved for 10-plus days. Eight hundred volunteers will come together to make this happen. It's extraordinary. I say to Alex Halat and every one of his hockey heroes and volunteers: good luck and Godspeed. I look forward to being there on May 4 for the kickoff and to congratulate them at the finale on the 14th.

Measles Immunization

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, with the increased cases of measles being reported in the province, I think it might be time that Alberta Health reconsiders its position on mandatory vaccinations. Increasing numbers of families and individuals are moving to Alberta. Currently there is a mandatory reporting for infectious diseases such as measles or a requirement for up-to-date inoculations.

A small segment of the population doubts the value of preventative inoculations. This is a considerable risk, however, appreciating the impact of measles, its highly contagious nature,

and the dangers imposed by a measles outbreak. I have heard from many of my constituents that it is time to consider mandatory vaccinations as has been emphasized by the medical officers of public health.

In order for a disease to mutate, it actually has to be transmitted to a host. The continuing reoccurrence of measles in our communities allows the opportunity for the disease to change. Potentially, the current vaccinations could lose their effectiveness due to the possibility of new strains developing. As well, the lives of citizens in Alberta that are particularly vulnerable to these types of infections are at risk each day. Unfortunately, it seems that for some the educational approach has not prevented this disease, and illnesses that should have been eradicated continue to occur. Some citizens are just not acknowledging the seriousness of the information shared with them.

Schools in Calgary have had to exclude students and teachers who have been exposed in order to lessen the risk of the latest measles cases. In fact, one high school has had to do so right at the important time of pre-exam work. The risks and the actual costs associated are completely unnecessary. Perhaps it's time to reassess this decision, and perhaps Alberta Health should do more than encourage and inform and actually require all students entering the Alberta educational system to be vaccinated. I would hate to hear of even one more incident of this completely preventable disease popping up here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of the introduction of Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, and Bill 13, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, are clear evidence that the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Actually, I'm tabling on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I have two tablings that reference the questions that he asked today in question period. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a report dated June 12, 2012, and released by Alberta Health Services. It's entitled Vaccine Hesitancy in Alberta, and it was prepared by Dr. Judy MacDonald, medical officer of health, Alberta Health Services.

The second tabling is an act that appears in Ontario, which details how children are required to have immunization before they may attend the first day of school. The immunizations are the usual set that we've been discussing today, including, particularly, measles.

We also have from New Brunswick copies of a similar Department of Education and Early Childhood Development policy, which is about proof of immunization for children before they attend school.

Finally, there's an article produced by CBC Radio that references Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba all requiring students to be vaccinated for diseases.

Thank you.

3:10

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document has been deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Griffiths, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Vital Statistics Act the Alberta Vital Statistics annual review 2012.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'll just revert quickly to a tabling that I have. I'm tabling today a memo from the Member for Red Deer-North requesting early consideration of her private member's bill, Bill 203, in Committee of the Whole on Monday, May 5.

Thank you.

We are at points of order, and I don't believe we had any today. Would I be correct? [interjection] I am correct? Okay. Thank you.

Let's move on, then.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 23: Ms Jansen]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake had requested an opportunity to speak. We can come back to her.

Let's go on to Edmonton-Centre, then, shall we?

Ms Blakeman: I'd be delighted. Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak to Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014, in second reading. Now, I would like to commend the responsiveness of the previous and the current minister responsible for children's services. This is to a great degree flowing from a quite incredible series of articles that were produced by two of our major newspapers in Alberta that, with much data mining and the use of FOIPs, were able to put together a really clear and quite chilling picture of what was happening to children who were under the care of the state, of the government of Alberta. What they discovered was that most of us were not aware of – and some people would say that the government had deliberately obscured it – the number of children who had in fact died while in care. There was great public pressure upon the government to update and improve the system.

A couple of points in particular kept coming forward. One of them was the prohibition against the publication of the name of a child who had died while in care or the name of anyone connected with them. This, in fact, had caused a great deal of grief and

difficulty for a number of people because they were actually being prohibited from publicly grieving for their deceased child because they couldn't name them. They couldn't put it on a tombstone. They couldn't have an article in the paper or an obituary that referenced that they were under the care and control of the government at the time.

It was really a bit of a throwback, or I suppose – I'm sorry – considering the secrecy of this government, a throw forward. They do like to keep things to themselves. There was a great deal of pressure on the previous minister and the current minister to make some adjustments.

What we see in this bill is the establishment of, I'm going to call it, an expert committee, and I believe we've already been introduced to several of the members who have been appointed to this. They're calling it a council. Chief Wilton Littlechild was here in the Assembly the other day and was introduced as being a member of that. Boy, that's bringing a lot of expertise to the table if that's the quality of people that are being appointed to this council. The idea is to look at the evolving nature of children in government care and how they're recorded and dealt with.

Now, of course, with my interest in activism and changing public policy but also in protection of personal information, I was most interested in the sections around the publication bans. When I first read this, I thought: what? You know how I scribble on the sides of the bills, and I've got scribbles on the sides saying: "Wait a minute. This is only allowing people to talk about living children. Deceased children had been taken out." But, no, in fact, if you go along, you see that they've dealt with that. Then I went back and read it even more and ended up coming away from it going: "What the blankety-blank is going on here? This is not what we were led to believe is going on."

I was sure, when I listened to the minister's press conferences and various releases and things, that that ban was lifted. That was the end impression that I got: the ban or the prohibition against publishing or using in a public way a child's name who died while under the care of government was going to be gone. As with many things with this government that are so frustrating to me, the answer is: sort of. And here's the sort-of part. What's actually being done here is that they have removed "deceased child" from the old prohibition, but what it says is that, in the opinion of the director,

a director may publish or consent to the publication of the name or a photograph of a child or of the child's parent or guardian and other information . . . [if] the publication is in the child's best interest or necessary for the proper administration of justice.

Let me double-check that I, in fact, read that correctly. Yeah. In fact, I'm thinking: "Okay. Good."

The next section:

(b) A child who is 16 . . . or older may publish, or consent to the publication of, the child's name or photograph in a manner that reveals that the child has received intervention services.

Okay. Then we get into this:

(c) A Court may, on the application of
 (i) a child,
 (ii) a parent or guardian of a child, or
 (iii) any interested party, with leave of the Court,
 grant permission to the child, the parent or guardian or the interested party

to publish or consent for the name and the photograph and various other things saying that the child has been receiving intervention if it's in the child's best interests or the public interest.

That's not a straight-ahead lifting of that prohibition. Once again we have these – how do I describe them? – kinds of defining

words that are used, or let me call them apron strings or ties. You're never quite away from this. If someone, any one of those groups or those defined, decides that it's not in the best interests of the child, all of this goes away. Okay. Well, there are a lot of different arguments that can be made about whether it's in the best interests of the child – the child, I'm reminding you, is no longer with us; they are deceased – or in the public interest. Again, a lot of people can bring arguments forward about whether it is or is not in the best interests of the public to know this.

I'm finding that this great lifting of a prohibition about talking about a deceased child and their name, photograph, and things like this is not actually what I thought it was going to be, that there's a little more whittling away at the central part of this – or not.

It goes on and really allows an ex parte application to the court to have that ban in place. People think: "Oh. Well, that's okay. Anybody that wants to can go to the court, and the court is going to decide." Yes, they are, but the court is always going to decide based on what they're reading and in the context of the rest of the legislation. Is there evidence in this act that there's thinking behind it that children's names and photographs and identifying information and that of their families might be withheld? Well, yeah, when you're allowing them to go to court and have this taken out.

3:20

A director who works for the department, a family member, or with leave of the court any other person – a pretty wide definition; it has to be approved by the court but: any other person – that's involved here can make an ex parte application to the court. Now, ex parte is one part. It means that it's without the knowledge. I believe – and I don't have a legal background here; there are lots of lawyers; I'm sure they'll correct me – you don't have to notify the other people that are involved in this. You just go to court – you have no obligation to tell them what you're up to – and if you're granted this, you've got it; there's a ban.

I'm thinking: okay; well, that's not exactly a straight-ahead lifting of this prohibition. It actually allows a lot of different groups to get in here and get a ban put in place without anybody else knowing that that's what's going on. Okay. I'm not keen on this, but I think: "Well, keep looking, Laurie. Big pile of manure there. There's got to be a pony underneath it." No. In fact, it isn't.

We've heard a lot of talk recently about equality and inequality, and I am always very cautious, when we talk about access to courts and needing to be able to go to court, of the inequality that exists in our society, particularly for women and people coming from a lower income, in their ability to be comfortable with, be familiar with, and have the money to access court proceedings.

What am I looking at in this bill? Well, once again there is, whether the minister meant to or not, a bias in favour of the department or, with the court's permission, any other person that is named being able to go back to court, without telling anybody else, and get this ban put back in place. Who is the group of people that is least likely to be able to find out about this, fight it, and get to court? It's probably the family of the kids because if your child is in care, you are statistically more likely to be coming out of a particular socioeconomic group.

So is this the ban that people thought they were going to get? Is this the lifting of the ban that you could publicize and talk publicly about children that had died while in government care? No, it's not. Are people going to have equal access and equitable access to be able to get a ban put in place? No. For a family that wanted to be able to do this, any director in the program or anyone else where the court says that it's okay without anyone else knowing can go and get this ban put in place.

So there's no pony, Mr. Speaker, underneath all of this. There's no pony there. The ban is still, actually, quite easy to get put in place by just about anybody that's interested in doing it and, particularly, makes it an unequal access to, most likely, the direct family members of the child. That's not what I thought I was getting here, so I feel tricked. I'm not a lawyer, but I'm not unfamiliar with the law. I've worked a lot with administrative law, and, in fact, everything we do here is administrative law as we create legislation, so I'm feeling like this isn't what we were all told was going to be coming.

There are a number of other kinds of legal beagle stuff here about, you know, who has to be served with a copy and that kind of thing. But in my reading of that, that's what we're looking at around that ban, and that was one thing that I was particularly interested in.

Let me just reference something else here. You know, one of the things that I have talked a lot about in this particular session is the lack of access, particularly for people of very low economic status in Alberta, even as low as for people that are on full benefit programs; for example, AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped, or Alberta Works or even people working full-time flat out on minimum wage. Actually, I think the people working on minimum wage would fall under the cut-off and therefore would be able to qualify for assistance from legal aid, but the person on AISH is too high, and they will not be able to get legal aid.

You start matching that lack of being able to get access to legal aid with the family that is trying to now perhaps get into court and put a ban in place, which the family could do, I admit, and it seemed to be the families who most wanted those bans against publication taken off. For the family of a child to get into court to try and fight this somehow, they're very unlikely to be able to access legal aid.

So this all starts to connect to each other. We have a law that is supposed to be changed to lift a ban, which it does, but it allows a lot of people to get the ban put back in place. For those people that would be most interested in trying to fight this, they are going to be very unlikely to be able to get legal help to be able to do it because they're quite likely to not be able to access legal aid given the cuts that we've had to legal aid in this province.

Mr. Denis: There have been no cuts.

Ms Blakeman: Well, the minister likes to say that there have been no cuts, but if you don't cut a program over a long period of time or several years in a row, inflation is going to do it for you, Mr. Speaker, and in the end you have less money. If I go into a store today and say, "Thank you; I'd like to buy my groceries with money that's actually valued from 2008," my money is not going to go as far. If I'm standing there with everything in the envelope that I used to get in 2008 and I'm standing there with it in 2014 at Safeway trying to dole it out of that envelope, it's not going to go as far, which has the same effect.

The Minister of Justice likes to argue semantics with me. I know he likes to do that. I swear to goodness that he goes home at night and has little semantic arguments with himself just to entertain himself. Because he uses it so much here, I know he's very keen on it.

The bottom line is: are people going to be able to get access to this? Will more people get access to more legal aid? No, they're not. [interjection] He's welcome to join the argument and claim that they will, but that's not what most of the legal community is telling me. But, you know, maybe he's got a different connection to them.

Let me just go back a bit here. The idea of the council: an excellent idea as a way of looking at the situation, being able to make sure that we are being welcoming and accepting of different kinds of families coming from different places that are, either long term or short term, struggling with their children to a point where they need government intervention.

You know, I have a very busy constituency office. I now have two caseworkers working in there, and we deal with some very complex, multilayered issues that my constituents are struggling with. One of the areas of casework that we do almost nothing with is children's services. If we get one or two cases a year, we all freak out because we can't remember who the contact is, and we have to dig through all of our contact books to find out who it is we're supposed to call in children's services. Why is that? Well, because the children in my community are overwhelmingly children that are coming as new immigrants or as new Canadians and living in the centre of the city while they get established, within a couple of years they move out, buy a house, or move into other areas, and they're gone from my community. Interestingly, we get almost no child welfare calls or cases from that community. They tend to work more as a village, and everyone pulls together and helps to raise the kids.

3:30

Frankly, the urban aboriginal people who live in my community: some of them do struggle. But I need to remind people that, overwhelmingly, urban aboriginal people are doing very well, thank you very much, and don't fit as much into that stereotype as people seem to think.

I don't have a lot of experience with child welfare, so that's telling you something. It's not always what we think it is, and I think it is important that as we work with things like the new council that's being put in place, we are conscious of people from different backgrounds and different cultures that are moving into this country and will become part of our history.

You know, there are many people in this room. There's a very strong Ukrainian background, people from Ukrainian backgrounds in here. There are some very outspoken Poles, a number of Scots in here. There are some backgrounds that we're quite familiar with, but we're not necessarily familiar with people from the Sudan or Somalia or Eritrea or Nigeria or any number of other places from which we are now receiving people that have been involved in war, in torture, and in trauma. We need to be aware of that because they are becoming part of the fabric of our life in Alberta, and we need to be able to understand how to work with those communities and perhaps even work with children that are victims of war and of torture and of trauma because they may well end up being children that are in government care or that need government assistance, and that's a whole other ball of wax than what we're used to.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014. Before we get started, I want to applaud the Minister of Human Services for going outside of the boundaries. From the time he took the ministry, he has really worked hard to propel this forward and has really worked hard to give the illusion and take some solid steps to have openness and transparency in this portfolio and actually do some of the things that have been missing for a significant period of time.

All that being said, I don't think we can look at this bill until we really understand why we're here in the first place. It's just this simple, Mr. Speaker. Four years ago a journalist asked a simple question: how many children in Alberta had died either while in foster care or after they had come to the attention of the child welfare system? She did this through FOIP.

The next few steps of that is where it becomes alarming for Albertans, and that's really why we're here today. When that journalist, Karen Kleiss, set out to find those answers, she discovered chaos and bureaucratic wrangling like none other she'd ever seen. Her fellow journalist Paula Simons wrote and I think sums it up quite well:

No one in the Alberta government would tell her. No one, it eventually emerged, could tell her. The government not only refused to release the data, citing its own sweeping confidentiality rules. It wasn't actually tracking the numbers.

What's interesting is that this secrecy and this hiding behind the confidentiality statements, quite frankly, made this journalist mad. So she took the matter to her boss at the paper, and they decided to go to court. For the next four years journalists and those papers, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*, had to fight this government to answer a single question about how many children had died in care or had died while in the child welfare system.

In 2013 they received a judgment that was victorious and said: yes, you should. It was only then that this journalist and her colleague Darcy Henton were able to actually access the government records. They came back to them heavily censored, and the documents confirmed what they actually thought was their worst suspicion, which is why they took this case to court. There were deaths, but also the deaths looked like they had been far worse than originally reported. It was interesting to these two journalists that the government didn't even know what was going on. As these two journalists first reported, "The Alberta government has dramatically under-reported the number of child welfare deaths over the past decade, undermining public accountability and thwarting efforts at prevention and reform."

The *Calgary Herald* and The *Edmonton Journal* published an in-depth series of articles detailing that a staggering 145 children had died in care since 1999, but this was triple the 56 deaths that were revealed by the government in annual reports. What's more interesting about that, Mr. Speaker, is that we all sat in this House last year when we listened to the Premier talk about how many deaths of children in care there were, and she supported the minister of that time, the current Premier, when he stood up on the floor on November 25, 2013, and said that 56 children had died in care, not 145 but 56. He also went on to say, "All incidents of serious injury or death are reported to the quality assurance council for investigation."

Unfortunately, that wasn't quite exactly accurate. The *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal* articles reveal the huge chasm between what Albertans were being told and what was actually happening. We also know that those initial reports obtained after the four-year battle found that 150 children in government care died from January 1999 to June 2013. What was even more staggering, though, is that when the current Minister of Human Services took over this portfolio, the number jumped to 741 children and teens known to child welfare authorities, including those living with their families but still receiving some form of service, that had died in the same time frame.

Mr. Speaker, there's a fundamental problem when the government claims to Albertans that 56 children have died in care and in reality 741 of them had died during the same period. There's also a fundamental problem when the only way we can find out about that is that journalists have to start a four-year battle

in court to find out information that everyday Albertans should know.

These numbers are appalling more so because we're talking about everyday Albertan children, shattered lives, and families wondering what happened to their children. We're talking about stories like a young mother who lost her child, then cleaned up her act. She then had to search for six years before discovering that her child had died as an infant.

I talked to that young mom's mother. She talked about her daughter's story. She talked about how her daughter was addicted, on drugs, on alcohol, completely gone off-path. She talked about how the child welfare system had come in and taken her child away. She talked about how shortly after that apprehension her daughter started to get clean, to clean up her act and become a good mom. And she talked about her daughter's six-year search for her daughter so that she could rebuild her family, so that she could at least say that she was sorry, so that she could at least write a letter to her and let her know why she had to be adopted out or in the system. She wanted to go back and rectify a terrible situation, and for six years that young girl was not even told that her daughter had died as an infant.

Mr. Speaker, that is shocking as a mom, as a dad, as a family member, as a caregiver, to not know for six years that the person that you had given over to the public system actually died within their first year of life. That is just unheard of in this province. But, unfortunately, it happened right here, and today we would not know anything about this if not for the work of the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*.

I think we have to remember that we're not here because the government decided to do the right thing. While this bill is a good first step, it didn't come as a result of doing the right thing. It came as a result of a shaming. It came as a result of not actually telling the truth. It came as a result of appearing like information was being withheld, hidden, and secret. It naturally leads to questions like: what is the government trying to hide; why wouldn't they want to talk about that; how do you fix a system that's broken if you don't even have accurate data to figure it out?

3:40

The unfortunate problem is that they actually had the data. So, then, why wouldn't you release it in the first FOIP that came? We could have saved four years. There were children who died within those four years. We could have changed processes. We could have made the Child and Youth Advocate independent in 2010, not in 2012. We could have identified systemic issues in the process, in the system. We could have worked with our aboriginal communities to create better kinship care. We could have worked with our Somali communities to create better care for their children. We could have done something. Instead, this government's approach was to fight them in court.

The *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* articles started an avalanche of questions and concerns, and many of them are still unanswered today. I have no doubt that this minister is actually going to work hard to try and get those answers. I hope that his government and I hope that his cabinet and his colleagues will help him do that.

What we saw next in January was the round-table. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I attended the round-table, and it was a moving experience. I think it was a good step to have the round-table. I think it was a great step to have experts there. I think it was a fantastic step for the minister to admit that 741 children had died in care or under intervention services. I think it was a great step for the minister to be humble, for the minister to bring people

together, and for the minister to listen to what he heard at that round-table. I think this bill for the most part does just that.

Several of the stories that we heard that day were of three young women who had been in care, which is where I'm going to go next with my concerns in this bill. They talked about the publication ban and how that ban affected their lives and how the current ban meant that they had no identity, how it prevented anyone from giving them an identity, how it prevented them from even talking about what was wrong with the system, how it could be fixed, and the fact that they had died.

I'll just read you a short segment from an *Edmonton Journal* article on February 3 that refers to these three young women.

The women's appearance at the Child Intervention Roundtable offered an unprecedented opportunity to hear how foster children feel about an Alberta law that makes it illegal to publish their names and photographs, even if they die while in care . . . The young women rejected the "in care" label and said they want to be treated just like anyone else.

Samantha went on to say:

How do you feel like a human being? How do you feel like a person, if . . . there's some publication ban saying that you don't exist, your story will not be shared, you will be forgotten? It's traumatizing.

Faven, who was 19, said that

family should have the right to release information, but she wouldn't want the details of her own life made public. She used a nickname on the panel, not her real name.

She went on to say:

I personally wouldn't want my information released, and I wouldn't want people to think, "Oh, Faven died, and she was in (foster) care." I just don't like the fact that we have the labelling . . . A child dies. A child is a child, and I don't think there should be any restrictions or limitations if the child is in care, or not. I don't think that I see the whole separation.

Monique, who was 20, also said:

Children and youth living in foster care are the same as other Albertans, and shouldn't be labelled.

I grew up with other children and youth; if one of them had died while I was in care, and I couldn't speak about it, that would definitely change the way I healed.

She also said:

We live with children of all ages . . . as well as foster families. They have their own children, who are not in care. They cannot speak about us. I don't think that it's fair, that we have that label on us, and we live with people who do not have that label.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question that it's difficult to balance the rights of privacy and public interest. The current ban, that exists pre this bill, clearly went too far. However, I think this bill also goes too far the other way. I think that we need to take a moment and listen to why some of the media talk about why they need access to this.

Before I go there, I just want to tell you a story about when I was at the round-table. Most people understand the issue of Phoenix Sinclair. There was a young lady who was there representing the government of Manitoba, and she said that Phoenix needed a voice, and without the media being able to report about the tragic situation of Phoenix Sinclair, then there would be no way we could fix the system by actually being allowed to submit the photo and the name of the child who was so tragically abused and eventually killed by his mother. There would be no ability to fix the system, and it wouldn't have been real.

I think we also have to identify with why Paula Simons has raised concerns about the publication ban. She believes that this bill will give "the government extraordinary powers to cover up the deaths of children in care" by actually becoming the proxy

who could apply for the ban. It could actually be the family member of the dead child. The band member, a grandparent, a sister, all of those could apply for an ex parte for a publication ban.

So could a third party, such as a First Nations band council. But while the ministry or band might have resources for such legal battles, parents, especially the sort who might typically be involved with the child welfare system, wouldn't likely have the resources to file an ex parte application. So while the act appears to empower parents, they're really at the mercy of the ministry and third-party actors.

I think we have to take that concern seriously.

She also goes on to say:

Under the proposed bill, a child's family, including siblings and grandparents, would be exempt from the ban, [even if they themselves requested the ban.] Family members could use social media sites . . . identifying the child and themselves. Mainstream media would still be bound by the ban, meaning that the public would only get to hear a narrow perspective . . .

Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to work with the minister, and I want to work with the minister, and I'm hoping that we can find a middle ground on how we reach the difference between privacy and public interest.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available.

Seeing no one, let us move on to Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great interest to speak here in second reading on Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014. Certainly, this bill was very warmly anticipated or very eagerly anticipated when we heard that the ministry was intending to release something here this spring. I think that so many different groups of the general public were also very interested in seeing some resolution in regard to clarifying how we receive information from the ministry and how we investigate deaths and incidents in this ministry as well.

Certainly, the minister himself characterizes Bill 11 as being part of a year-long process. I guess I would like to give both the ministry and the government in general the benefit of the doubt, to recognize that we are going to move forward on more issues around this issue. I guess there's lots of room for improvement from the previous circumstance, but I'm just starting to sort of look at this as the public would, from the outside working in. There are lots of details about how we report from the ministry here that perhaps we could clarify and somehow sharpen as well.

I think that, certainly, improving the publication opportunities for information from the ministry is good, but the details in Bill 11, as we see it, certainly still need work. I think that this does clarify an internal practice, an internal review, the death review committee, which is good as well. This will certainly help to improve the internal practice and quality within the ministry; however, Mr. Speaker, we just still don't see a clear provision for ensuring that fatalities or serious injury investigations will be published. I think that is at the heart of what people were looking for, and I just don't necessarily see that it's here at this point, still.

3:50

I mean, instead, as far as I can see, they will publish the recommendations from the internal review, but then the public still can't really assess the merits of recommendations without understanding the facts or the history upon which they are based. You need to see the whole picture, not just the recommendations.

Otherwise, it's like we are doing sort of a forensic detective process that can only lead to, perhaps, confusion and sometimes misinformation. As well, we're not quite entirely sure whether this act will be publishing the regular details on the status of recommendations. Certainly, this needs to happen on an ongoing basis, and it's not clear whether that is going to happen either.

The bill, as far as we can see, is still not reporting on fatalities on an as-they-occur basis. Instead, it's sort of piling up and reporting at the end of the year, right? That's what they were doing before, and as a result they only reported a fraction of fatalities and even went as far as to sort of make it confusing, saying that the numbers that were reported were reflective of all categories such as children in care, children with their own family but receiving supports that were known to the ministry, a child that was in care within the last two years, or a child that died of natural causes but could have also been related to neglect somehow.

Since 2008 we were not getting all of those categories in their totality, so that's why, when the *Edmonton Journal* did their FOIP and did their larger report – and thanks to them for doing that – we saw reports of so many more fatalities last fall, because before we were only getting partial statistics. I think that that's something that's glaringly obvious that we need to do. I think that through reporting on an as-it-occurs basis, reporting on incidents as they do occur, we might be able to reduce that confusion with this bill.

We as the Alberta New Democrats are looking for an advocate that has the resources to investigate all cases in all of those categories, as I pointed out, right? Last year, really, the Child and Youth Advocate only had the capacity to report about between 3 and 5 cases out of more than 20 that we can see that actually existed. Now the mandate has been expanded to include the deaths of children who were in care within the last two years, but still the commissioner is without sufficient resources to really pursue that as they should, as we learned from a review of both his resources and a report that he made to our committee.

It's important, I think, as well to recognize some of the inconsistencies or some of the confusions that the media is seeing with the ability to report. In my mind, if you are building a means by which you are going to release names of children that died in care and so forth, then it should be done in its totality and not have this sort of partial ban, where mainstream media seems to be still excluded from some cases, but then social media seems to be some way by which the information can leak out.

Also, sometimes you have unfortunate circumstances – I mean, all of this is dealing with unfortunate circumstances – you know, where some family members might be in dispute or not in communication with each other when there is information about a child that has been injured or died in care. You have to be able to apply the law equally and evenly even amongst different family members who might be in dispute in regard to what's happening to a child in that family.

I think that in principle, as I've come to always remind myself during second reading, this is a good idea – right? – to pursue the greater disclosure as recommended in Bill 11. However, I think that there are some inconsistencies here that we really do need to deal with before we consider passing this bill or supporting the bill, and I think that's a good chance for us to do this in the Legislature.

Again, I do commend the minister for bringing this forward. I understand that he is pursuing this as part of a process, a year-long process, and I'm glad that he is using the expertise and the reasonable debate that does take place here in the Legislature to ensure that we build a Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act that everybody can be proud of and that can work for the majority of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to second reading of Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014. I'm just going to very briefly, for the benefit of all members and Albertans, go over what this act is proposing to amend.

First, it amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, amends the publication ban to reverse the onus. Now, for example, a family member or interested party must apply for a court order if they do not want the name or a photograph of a deceased child or names and photos of family members and guardians to be published. Previous to this amendment act, Mr. Speaker, there was a blanket ban, an automatic ban, on identifying information of a deceased child who received services. There was a penalty of \$10,000 or six months in jail. Now, the family member can apply to the court to have it lifted, but this is quite a costly endeavour.

This bill changes the quality assurance framework to add the ability of the minister to appoint a committee for quality assurance purposes and expands the requirements of the director to notify the council of death or injury of a child receiving services, where previously only if they were in care or guardianship at the time could that take place, Mr. Speaker. It expands the mandate of the council to monitor and evaluate strategies and standards with the minister.

Now, it doesn't change the openness of the quality assurance council reporting. The committee only needs to make reports to the minister – in a few moments I'll talk about the concerns that I have with that – as opposed to reporting to the public. The council still needs to make a publicly released report available to the minister in the case of an expert review panel investigation into a death or injury, but there's still no mandatory provision that it must be released publicly.

The second thing is the amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act. It changes the mandate of the Child and Youth Advocate to investigate death or injury that occurred within two years of receiving services. Now, previous to this act that we're discussing today, Mr. Speaker, there was only an investigation if a child was receiving services at the time of death or injury. Again, another point that I'll speak to a little bit later is that there is still no increased budget or reporting requirements, which is of great concern for myself and for the Alberta NDP.

Bill 11 is a small step, a tentative step, in the right direction, but again, for us, it doesn't go far enough to have the level of transparency that we want. Unfortunately, the bureaucracy that is in place, which has and can harm the system's ability to improve the lives of children, still exists even with this bill's amendments.

Now, like my colleague from Edmonton-Calder I would like to thank the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* for the investigative work that they did and the pressure that they put on this government to finally release the full number of deaths of children involved in the child intervention system. I also want to add that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been a tireless advocate for years on this subject and has been calling for the release of information, of these reports, so that we know. Anyway, we're slowly moving in the right direction, but at the same time when we look at the number of deaths of children in care for this year, the statistic is quite troubling and indicates that we have a lot more work to do.

4:00

Moving to the publication ban. I mean, this is a step to moving towards increased transparency. However, again, we're not quite there yet, Mr. Speaker. A mother of a child who died in care had this to say about the publication ban. "They have failed the child in the utmost way possible and now they are stealing their identity – the only thing they have left . . . It's bad enough to lose a child, but to have it covered up is just wrong and I won't stand for it."

You know, eliminating the automatic publication ban is a positive step. Again, this is long overdue. This is something that the government has been promising, to review the ban, for at least three years. We've spoken about other bills in this way, that again it's another example of knuckle dragging, but eventually you can drag a horse to water. It was put in legislation in 2004 without any consultation with the Privacy Commissioner.

Now, the current ban prevents us from learning how to prevent future deaths and injuries. It shields the government from this criticism, but it also punishes already grieving families who want to tell their story and to have some closure. Further, it dehumanizes these children, who have already been victimized, Mr. Speaker, although this bill moves in the right direction in that it removes the blanket ban and reverses the onus. So the general presumption now is that the media and family can discuss the deceased child and provide the public with information to help us understand.

The bill also wisely safeguards the ability of the courts to nonetheless restrict the publication of this information where necessary in the interests of the child. However, Mr. Speaker, the procedure to obtain these orders to restrict publication presents a number of problems that may reduce the effectiveness of this legislative change. The idea is that now a party must apply to the court for an order to restrict publication. This application is *ex parte*, meaning that it does not need to be done with any notice or any arguments from any other party. The parties who can apply include the family, any interested third party, or the government if they can argue that it's the wishes of the child or in the best interests of the child's surviving siblings.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the government is still reserving the power to get publication bans without any need for notice to or input from any other party like the media or the child's family. Now, in order to have restrictions removed, the media or the other party would have to go through a possibly lengthy court process. You know, the Alberta NDP is also questioning how accessible this procedure is for families who may be rightfully seeking publication restrictions. As we know, court processes are not cheap even in an expedited process. It could create a situation where the government applies for an order contrary to the wishes of the family. At this point the family would have to use their own resources in order to engage the court to get the order lifted. There are other practical problems, including the fact that these orders only apply to those who serve them.

Mr. Speaker, we generally support the idea of the reverse onus. This information should be available to the public, but of course there need to be, obviously, exceptions for the best interest of the child and their family.

For some more effective publication rules we can look to some of the other jurisdictions within Canada, Mr. Speaker. Now, interestingly, only Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have bans similar to Alberta's. Quebec has one, but it actually doesn't enforce it. Ontario and P.E.I. have no restrictions. Saskatchewan and Manitoba allow for the publication of the name and information about the child if it comes from family. B.C. and Newfoundland and Labrador allow the publication of the name and information about the child if it comes from family or other sources. Even in other

jurisdictions with looser restrictions families, though, can and do apply for bans in specific cases where it's necessary to protect the best interests of the surviving children.

In regard to the Child and Youth Advocate, Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to see an expanded investigative mandate. Again, this is something that the NDP has been calling for for years, and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has repeatedly called for investigations into the death of every child in care or receiving services. Now, interestingly, at the Legislative Offices Committee meeting on November 29, 2013, the NDP brought forward a motion to expand the budget of the Child and Youth Advocate so that these investigations can actually be done. Expanding the mandate is one thing, but if there aren't the resources there for the advocate to do their job, then they're not going to be able to do their job. Instead of acknowledging the budget gap and the effect it's having on the ability of the advocate to investigate and report publicly on the deaths – you can guess who voted this motion down. Of course, it was the PC Party.

Now, it seems that they're finally admitting that the advocate needs an expanded mandate so that we can ensure that we learn from all tragic incidents and learn how to prevent them from happening again, but we see in this bill that there are still certain aspects that are being left out, Mr. Speaker. Allowing the advocate to investigate the deaths or injury of children when the incident occurred within two years of a child receiving services will give us a much more comprehensive understanding of some of the systemic issues that give rise to these tragedies in the first place.

The advocate also serves an important role in providing justice and closure for children who have been injured or have died, certainly, but the office has another important objective of providing independent insight and analysis into the childhood intervention system to ensure that we can make the necessary improvements to prevent future deaths or injuries. In order to fulfill these objectives, the advocate needs to be empowered with adequate resources and mandate.

Now, expanding the mandate in this bill is a great first step, but again a great concern, that the Alberta NDP share, is that without a corresponding expansion in the advocate's resources, you know, this change in the legislation will not have the impact that the government is expecting it to have or that we all hope or desire it to have.

The advocate already confirmed that due to a lack of resources, he has no choice but to prioritize and filter the cases that get reported to his office. Interestingly, from 2012 to '13, Mr. Speaker, 20 cases were reported to the advocate and only four, or 20 per cent of them, proceeded to a full investigative review. The advocate has to differentiate responses to each case because he does not have the adequate resources, and there's no mandatory provision for investigative reviews. That's, again, something that the Alberta NDP has been calling for, that he needs the resources available in order to do his job.

Mr. Speaker, you know, as I said, this bill is a step, a very small step in the right direction. However, we'd like to see much more done in this area. So we will be putting forward amendments during Committee of the Whole, and I look forward to debate and, hopefully, some clarification from the minister.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn to 1:30 p.m. on May 5.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:09 p.m. to Monday, May 5, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to April 24, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft.), 146-54 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 184-87 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 217-18 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 226-28 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 231-34 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2014; SA 2014 cS-2.5]

2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 84 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 154-56 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187-88 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c2]

3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)

First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143-45 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c3]

4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 145-46 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 184 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 191-93 (Mar. 11, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 229 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 250 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft.), 330 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 cE-12.5]

5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 119 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 174 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 188-90 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 218-20 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 228-29 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 230 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c1]

6 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Minister of Municipal Affairs)

First Reading -- 300 (Mar. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 330-31 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft.), 417-21 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 493-503 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 522-23 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 657 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c5]

- 7 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 488-93 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 523 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 657 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2014 c6]
- 8 Appropriation Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 488 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 519-20 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 523-27 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 559-62 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft.), 563-80 (Apr. 22, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 610-23 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft.), 633-38 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 24, 2014; SA 2014 c4]
- 9 Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 484 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 520-21 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 544-59 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft.), 625-31 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft.), 638-57 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., adjourned on amendment)
- 10 Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 484-85 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 522 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 559 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft.), 580-96 (Apr. 22, 2014 eve., passed on division)
- 11 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014 (Bhullar)**
First Reading -- 541 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 623-25 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft.), 673-79 (Apr. 24, 2014 aft., adjourned)
- 201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 (Kubinec)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 123-34 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship)
- 202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 264-79 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., defeated on division)
- 203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 249 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 352-61 (Apr. 7, 2014 aft.), 444-50 (Apr. 14, 2014 aft., passed)
- 204 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014 (Barnes)**
First Reading -- 263-64 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 450-52 (Apr. 14, 2014 aft., adjourned)
- 205 Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014 (Hale)**
First Reading -- 609 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014 (Calahasen)**
First Reading -- 609 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 5, 2014

Issue 24

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 5, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members.

Let us pray. In a world that has known conflict throughout its history, let us pray for peace to prevail and for human rights to be recognized even where they are not so commonly known today. Let us pray that our province and our country continue to be examples to the world of what freedom is truly all about. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you, all. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly His Excellency Mr. Gian Lorenzo Cornado, ambassador of the Italian Republic. He is accompanied by Mr. Fabrizio Inserra, who is the consul general of the Italian Republic in Vancouver.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first official visit to Alberta for Ambassador Cornado since taking the post just over one year ago. However, it's not his first posting in Canada. From 1987 to 1992 he served as consular secretary in the Ottawa embassy and as the consul general in Montreal from 2000 to 2004. Ambassador Cornado has played and will continue to play a valuable role in strengthening the friendship between our jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Italy have a long-standing trade, investment, and cultural relationship. Italy is Alberta's fourth-largest export market in Europe, averaging \$154 million per year. A large portion of that is wheat. Alberta imports from Italy more than \$328 million per year of products, consisting mainly of wine, machinery, iron, and steel. There are approximately 88,000 Albertans of Italian descent, making it the 12th-largest ethnic group in the province. We will continue to work together to build on our ties so that both our jurisdictions can thrive today, tomorrow, and in the future.

I'd like now to ask Ambassador Cornado to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with the Minister of Health, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members an exceptional group of students from Westbrook elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. Today we are joined by Mr. Shawn Nordstrom, the teacher, and three parent helpers: Mr. Shawn Sipma, Ms Karin Lefsrud, and Ms Mackenzie Linnen. This class is also attending School at the Legislature. They have some very interesting and challenging questions. I'd ask all of them, please, to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 61 grade 6 students from Holy Spirit Catholic school along with their teachers and helpers Catrina Chapman, Jenna Bishop, Kathryn Knox, Paula Federwick, Leigh Ann O'Sullivan, Stephen Dallon, and Lesley MacAllister. I would ask the group from Holy Spirit Catholic school to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 27 energetic young students from Viking school. Being from Viking school, they not only know what lefse and lutefisk is; they probably had it for breakfast. [interjections] Oh, yeah. The Norwegian section over there. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Dianne Kolybaba and Mrs. Trudy Josephson as well as parent helper Mrs. Nancy Mizera. I had a chance to meet with these young people in the rotunda before our session. They are energetic and a fine example of students from my constituency. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let us move on with other important guests. Let us turn to Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Associate Minister – Seniors.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Alberta Legislature eight representatives from the Armenian community here today for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta's inaugural commemoration ceremony recognizing the Armenian genocide of 1915.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your leadership in hosting the remembrance and for the leadership of the Premier of our great province and all colleagues and guests from the Armenian community. It is vital to acknowledge the importance of the Armenian genocide of 1915, where 99 years ago a heinous crime, a great tragedy against the Armenian people was committed and should never be forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery – and thank you very much for that privilege – and I would now ask them to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names. I would like to welcome this afternoon Mr. Shahin Soheili, director, Western Canada Armenian Holy Apostolic church of Canada; Archpriest Reverend Keghart Garabedian, pastor of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic church of B.C.; Mrs. Mayda Beylerian, chair,

Church Council, Armenian Holy Apostolic church of Canada; Mr. Arsen Vaganyan, leader, Edmonton Armenian community; Dr. Edward Ohanjanians, leader, Red Deer Armenian community; Mr. Artak Grigoryan, former combat support platoon leader, Armenian peacekeeping brigade, and community member – we thank him for his service – Mr. Suren Vaganyan, community communications specialist; and Ms Sona Grigoryan, community treasurer.

I'd now ask the Assembly to please honour my guests by giving them the traditional welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you.

Let us move on to the Associate Minister – Seniors, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Nicole Zens, a grade 6 home-school student from Sherwood Park who's studying local government. She's accompanied by her mother, Jody Zens. I had the opportunity earlier to briefly meet them. They had just done a tour, and it sounds like they're having a great day. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by the Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly and to welcome one of my spectacular councillors from the town of Devon and his family to the Legislature today. We have with us today Michael and Angela Laveck and their two wonderful children, Jadin and Daniel. I had the chance to meet with them in my office, and I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Kelta Coomber. I met Kelta earlier today, and she is joining my office through the Alberta student ministerial internship program at the Legislature. Kelta just completed her degree in political science through the honours program and is pursuing a master's program this fall. I would ask Kelta to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation, followed by the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine from Fort McMurray, Nicole Ardell. Nicole has come today to observe the proceedings of the Legislature and to watch as her petition is presented, with the aim of working with government to make improvements to the immunization process for children in Alberta schools. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour to introduce an amazing and inspirational young Albertan who is really one of a kind. He was an MLA for a Day almost a decade ago, and he's had an amazing journey ever since, having travelled to 20 countries on five continents. He often asks: what's the adventure for today, boss? He's worked in my constituency office, my Annex office, our Wellness office, and on all of our campaigns, including as our fine manager. He has a very positive attitude, and his philosophy to always embrace new opportunities has served him well. He has no less than four offers for law school this fall. His family is very proud of him. Our family is very proud of him. I'm very pleased to introduce my good friend Mr. Joey Redman.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, I note that your additional guests will be arriving later. Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes each.

Armenian Genocide Anniversary

Mrs. Kalagian-Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, today is a very special day in the Alberta Legislature thanks to you and to my colleague and friend the MLA for Edmonton-Decore. Today we commemorated the 99th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. We have members and leaders of the Armenian community in Alberta as well as Archpriest Reverend Garabedian of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic church in B.C. here today to commemorate this solemn occasion with us.

This is a very important occasion because we need to remember the historically correct past in order to promote healing, justice, and peace throughout the world. It is an important occasion because over 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children were tortured and brutally murdered by a government that now uses political manipulation, retaliation, and financial incentive to continue to deny the Armenian genocide and to attempt to reshape the historical facts. Over 8 million Armenians have experienced a century of injustice due to the failure of the Turkish government to recognize the Armenian genocide while more than 35 countries around the world, including Canada, officially recognize the genocide.

Just as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada has recognized the pain and suffering caused to this very day by residential schools and is now the catalyst for healing, justice, and peace, so too must the Turkish government recognize their injustices of the past. I'm not here to condemn a government but to praise the people of Armenian and Turkish descent who are working together in solidarity for reconciliation and calling on their own government to recognize the genocide. By concentrating on the injury and injustice to the people of Armenia, we have almost forgotten the injury suffered by many Turkish people who opposed the torture and murder of their neighbours and friends.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I ask that everyone remember the lessons taught by my Armenian grandmother, Mariam Kalagian, that love is better than hate and that this world will only survive if we love one another. And if anyone should ask, "Who remembers the Armenians?" we can say, "We remember."

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Stony Plain.

Nobleford

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and tell you about a success story in the Little Bow riding. It's not of just one person or one company, but it's about an entire community, Nobleford. The village is just 20 kilometres north of Lethbridge, and if you ever have the opportunity, I'd ask you to please swing by and see what the village has to offer.

Now, you can understand and sense that in rural Alberta a lot of small towns seem to be rolling up and withering, so to speak, but Nobleford is the exact opposite, Mr. Speaker. They've gone from 600 people in 2006 to 1,300 people in the last census. Along with that, they also have the lowest taxes in Alberta. Can you imagine having a house that's worth \$330,000 – that's the assessment on it – and only paying \$1,000 for your taxes? It's not a bad idea. Some great things to have.

One of the other things, Mr. Speaker, is that I was happy to be invited on April 12 to their fire hall opening. It just goes to show you how well-connected local decision-making can be done correctly in rural Alberta. They built the fire hall. They're under budget. They'd saved enough money that they paid for over half of it before the building was even constructed, and they don't even have a loan on it. The beautiful part of that whole fire hall is that when you're there at the opening with the people from the area – the second fire chief's son is actually the chief official officer of the village, so it goes back to the ties, but also it's a young, vibrant community for people to move into. I think one of the beautiful things . . .

An Hon. Member: Do they build schools?

Mr. Donovan: Yes, they do have schools also. It's a great place to be.

Mr. Speaker, because of the leadership shown by the current council, Nobleford is becoming one of the most attractive places to live and do business. It's also encouraging to see so many young families move back to this village and raise their family in the atmosphere of rural Alberta, knowing their kids are going to be safe and can walk around town safely without any concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to thank the current and previous council for their vision, that will allow them to have more success as they approach their centennial anniversary year in 2018. I'd just like to thank everybody. If you ever have the chance to go through, please stop and visit the village of Nobleford.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Sherwood Park.

Temporary Foreign Worker Program Moratorium

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is booming. I see help-wanted signs in shop windows and hear of industries around Alberta looking to fill vacant positions. It is only natural in an economy experiencing an economic upswing to see people coming from all over to take advantage of job opportunities, yet migration within Canada has not been sufficient to meet Alberta demands. Fortunately, Alberta businesses have been able to find some relief through the temporary foreign worker program. Temporary foreign workers, or TFWs, are able to work in Canada for up to four years. However, the federal government recently issued a moratorium on TFWs in the food services sector.

I know this is a concern to my constituents and to small businesses across the province. Mr. Speaker, how are restaurants across Alberta supposed to cope with this sudden change? If they do not have adequate staffing, they are unable to provide the customer service needed to generate profits. This may force them to close, resulting in the loss of jobs for Albertans also employed in these businesses.

It is my understanding that this moratorium is a result of employers abusing the system and hiring TFWs over Canadians, which is against the law. That being said, our labour market is unique in comparison to the rest of Canada. Our job vacancy rate has been the highest in Canada for the past three years, and our unemployment rate is consistently under 5 per cent, which indicates a balanced labour market. This means that if every employable person was working, we would still experience a labour shortage.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs temporary foreign workers to accommodate our growth now and into the future. I look forward to a speedy review of the program by the federal government so our food service industry can be assured of labour that will be available when they need it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, a reminder that a maximum of 35 seconds is allowed for each question and each answer.

Let's start with Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader for her first main set of questions.

Trust in Government

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier stood in front of a roomful of well-heeled PC supporters and said that he was sorry. Now, we've been around long enough to know how rare a PC apology is, so I suppose he should be commended, but apologizing to your party for historically low approval ratings and actually apologizing to Albertans for mismanaging the province are two different things. So here's an opportunity for the Premier. Will he be accountable to all Albertans, not just his party faithful, and apologize on his government's behalf for breaking their trust?

1:50

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, each and every day I take seriously the responsibility of being Premier of this province, a responsibility that my caucus has asked me to take on, and I'm truly privileged to do so. As part of that responsibility we have to take very seriously the concerns of Albertans. We need their trust. We need to earn that trust each and every day, and I will strive every day that I'm in this office, as do all members of this government, to earn that trust, to treat Albertans with respect, and to treat their money with respect.

Ms Smith: You see how hard it is to say sorry, Mr. Speaker.

A month ago the Premier brushed aside criticism and refused to apologize for his party's past mistakes. Apologies have already been made, he told a Calgary newspaper. Now all of a sudden he's sorry. Albertans want to believe he's genuine, but the fact is that the Premier's apology came the day after a new research survey showed that the PC Party is about as popular as a May blizzard. To the Premier: how are Albertans to believe that his apology is anything but a cynical political move motivated by his party's unpopularity?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition can interpret any way she wants. I'm not really too concerned about her view of the world. What I am concerned about is Albertans' view of the world and what Albertans want from their government and what Albertans deserve from their government, very, very concerned about ensuring that this government acts responsibly for Albertans and for Albertans' future. That's what we aim to do. I am very, very sorry that we've been distracted from that by our own actions, and we're taking every step we can to make sure that we do not do that again so that Albertans can be assured that we will do the best for their grandchildren.

Ms Smith: We're getting closer, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier's apology came at the PC Party's annual fundraiser in Edmonton. A video was shown to honour past PC Premiers: Peter Lougheed, Don Getty, Ralph Klein, and Ed Stelmach. Well, obviously, there was one missing. Between the video and the Premier's carefully scripted apology it's clear the PCs are attempting to expunge from the record the leadership of the Member for Calgary-Elbow. Does the Premier actually believe that his 43-year-old government's long list of failures is the sole responsibility of one person, who was in charge for 29 months?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in the 43 years that this particular party has had the privilege of serving Albertans, there have been many, many successes. In fact, there are many jurisdictions that have resources, but this is the jurisdiction that has led the world in environmental technology, in oil and gas extraction, in agriculture, and in so many places. Yes, there have been some things that we could do better, and we will do better on those things. But, no, every single leader of this party has provided a service to Albertans in their time, including my immediate predecessor.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions.

Electricity System

Ms Smith: Among the things that the PC government needs to apologize to Albertans for is the mess they have made of power transmission. Several years ago we began warning Albertans that if the government went ahead with Bill 50, ratepayers would be gouged. Last week we learned that AltaLink, the major beneficiary of the mistakes in Bill 50, has been sold for four times what it was worth 12 years ago. Now its owners have netted a \$2.4 billion profit. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans who've been gouged on their power bills for the last decade?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we'll say to Albertans is that we are proud of the investment climate that Alberta has, and it is a strong investment climate here in Alberta. With regard to this business we'll make sure that it goes through a federal process and through an AUC process to make sure that it is fair to Albertans.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we warned that Albertans would be stuck paying much more than necessary to build transmission lines we didn't need, because it's in the interest of transmission companies to overbuild. They get a guaranteed 9 per cent rate of return, and now we see that their special relationship with government has turned a 400 per cent profit in just 12 years. We warned that billions were at stake and that consumers would be gouged. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans for ignoring the experts and forcing through power lines that we don't need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how the hon. member can talk about that, because a deal hasn't even happened yet. It has a federal process to go through – and I'm sure she has faith in that process – and it has the process of the AUC. What is important to this government is that there is power there for Albertans when they need it and that it's affordable when they need it. That's exactly what we are doing.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the government's decision to sole source these contracts and the impact it's having on power bills. That doesn't change regardless of who owns it.

Every Albertan who opens their power bill knows that transmission costs and other fees can sometimes be more than the actual cost of electricity. Transmission lines remain the regulated part of the electricity business and is the part that is the biggest mess. We warned Albertans that this government's power line policy was going to cost us billions, and it has. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans for gouging them on their power bills so that their friends at transmission companies could earn a sizeable . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this government is doing is making sure that when Albertans want to turn the lights on that the lights are there to turn on. We are building out for this province. With over 100,000 people coming to this province every year, we need to make sure that we have power for them to be able to turn on. That's responsible government. That is what we're doing. We're making sure the prices are affordable.

The Speaker: The third and final main set of questions.

Government Policies

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, so much to apologize for. Real apologies, though, require making amends. Let's take public-sector relations. This government has passed Bill 46, which was struck down by the courts. Bill 45, which is equally unconstitutional and insulting, is a complete affront to free speech. Bill 9, which would impact public-sector pensions, has been rejected by all the unions, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and now the mayor of Calgary. If this government is serious about apologizing, will it also make amends by scrapping Bill 45 and halting Bill 9?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition aspires to be a leader in this province but only wants to do the easy work. In fact, governing is actually quite difficult, and it's very complex. You do have to do things like pension reform. You do have to understand that you not only have an obligation to today's Albertans, but you have an obligation to tomorrow's Albertans. That is part and parcel of governing, that takes difficult work, and that takes complex discussions with all the stakeholders, not just to hear the yells but to get deep into the issues and to come to complex conclusions, and that's what this government is doing.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it shouldn't be hard to show basic respect for our front-line workers.

This government also needs to apologize and make amends in education and health. For months we've been saying that there is no chance that the government will hit any of its school-building targets. There just aren't any shovels in the ground. In Health this

weekend they finally admitted that family care clinics were not the answer and that we wouldn't get 140 of them after all. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans and admit that there wasn't a single word of truth in his party's election platform?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, again the Leader of the Opposition wants to deal with tactics and not outcomes. This government is interested in outcomes. When we're talking about family care clinics and primary care networks, what we're talking about is creating a platform so that Albertans can take care of their own health, being supported by teams of health care professionals who work together. Whether they do that within the confines of a family care clinic or supported by a primary care network matters not as long as they have the support services from the health care professionals that they need to manage their chronic conditions, to help them stay healthy.

Ms Smith: I cannot believe that they can't simply say: sorry.

Let's try one more, Mr. Speaker. We've pointed out over and over again that this government has an entitlement problem with the use of government planes. They've been made into personal taxis for vacations and fundraising events. If the apology were sincere, we would know what the ex-Premier was doing in Jasper during the flood; instead, they keep hiding the truth. If the Premier's apology were sincere, the government would make amends by selling the government air fleet. When can we expect the Premier to do that?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I said to Albertans on Thursday was that this government and this Premier are very sorry that we have not made sure that the public understood what we were doing and why we were doing it, and that we wanted to make sure that every dollar that we spend on behalf of Albertans is spent well. We have allowed the issues around those things to become distractions from the real governing issues of how we create the right kind of place for our children and grandchildren. We will now make sure that every dollar spent is spent appropriately, that for flights that are taken, people understand what the value of those is and why we're doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Public Service Pension Legislation

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bills 9 and 10 are the latest examples of this government's ready, fire, aim approach to legislation. On Friday Mayor Nenshi wrote to the Premier, saying that he and council "believe that the proposed changes will gravely impact The City of Calgary." It could have a "crippling effect [on the] labour force . . . operations and finances." He strongly urged the Premier and the government to table Bill 9 so that significant issues could be addressed before any changes to pension legislation. Premier, a simple question: will you kill Bill 9?

2:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 9 is up later for debate, as I understand, but go ahead if you wish, hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member understood the parliamentary process, he'd know that once a bill is in the House, it's not in the hands of any member to kill the bill. The process of the House will proceed. Debate on Bill 9 will proceed. As we always do, we listen to Albertans, listen to the input we get, and determine the progress of the bill based on what needs to be done.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm just asking the Premier to show some leadership and make a commitment to do the right thing.

Two weeks ago I pointed out that the cost of recruiting and retaining workers will increase as higher wages are demanded to make up for less attractive public-sector pensions. On Friday Mayor Nenshi made the same point and said that it will increase the administrative costs to the city of Calgary. I bet lots of other municipalities, AUMA, and AAMD and C share the same concerns as the Alberta Liberals and Mayor Nenshi. Premier, how much will Bill 9 cost municipalities and the province . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier, again recognizing that this is on the Order Paper for later.

Mr. Hancock: Again, yes, Mr. Speaker, it is on the Order Paper today, and those are perfectly good questions for the member to raise in debate. But I will say this. The city of Calgary had an opportunity to participate in the discussion and the consultation around the issues of pension reform and did participate, but it didn't participate on the issues that came in this latest letter because the issues in the latest letter are more around the window dressing around the bill as opposed to the substantive issues in the bill. However, we will be taking into account the letter that we got. I'll be meeting with the Minister of Finance later, and we will discuss how those issues can be addressed.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, they might have picked up the phone, but according to this letter this government obviously didn't listen to the city of Calgary.

I'll tell you one more thing about this Premier: he's a uniter, not a divider. He has united every union against bills 9 and 10. He has united the mayor of Calgary and city council against Bill 9. He has united every opposition party in the House against this government's attack on pensions. This government is now desperately fighting a multifront war, which will probably end badly for them. Premier, for the good of Alberta workers and municipal governments will you do the right thing and the smart thing and kill these bills?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I was almost sure that at the end of that sentence he was going to say: and resign. I'm so relieved.

Mr. Speaker, as I just indicated to the hon. member, once a bill is in the House, it belongs to the House, not to the government, and it is not in the hands of the government to kill a bill. We will proceed with the debate on the bill as it is on the Order Paper today, as you've so graciously pointed out several times already, and in the course of that debate, as the bill goes through the House, we'll determine what the appropriate way is to deal with the issues that people both in the opposition and the public raise.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition. [applause]

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to all the hon. members. I love them all dearly; I just don't think they should be running the province.

Mr. Speaker, this week the mayor of Calgary sent the Premier a letter about Bill 9. The mayor outlined seven major problems with Bill 9, including making it harder for the city and other employers to attract and retain good employees. To the Premier: given the mayor's comments and those of so many others, concerned stakeholders and citizens, will you do the right thing and withdraw Bill 9?

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, you know that Bill 9 is on the Order Paper, but proceed as you wish.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, at the beginning could I say exactly the same to the hon. member? I do love him dearly, but I also don't want him running the province.

Again, it's not in the hands of government to withdraw a bill once it's committed to the House, so, no, we will not withdraw the bill. But the hon. member should realize that everybody had opportunity to have their input with respect to the pension reforms. There are important issues with respect to pension reform that need to be carried through. We do need to hear and listen to what people are saying about it to make sure we're doing the right thing, and we will.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the government certainly does have the power to withdraw a bill. I think the Premier is not correct on that. But this evening we will be debating a motion from the NDP to refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future for public hearings. Will the Premier and his government support that motion?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member, who has been in this House I think almost as long as I have, ought to know that the process is that individual members get to vote in this House as to what happens. It would be entirely inappropriate for the Premier to stand up and say that the government will direct all of its members to vote in this particular way. Now, having said that, I also would question what the hon. member's intentions are. Does he want the bill withdrawn, killed, or defeated, or does he want it referred to committee?

The Speaker: This is one of the problems with getting into anticipation, so let's be careful here.

The hon. leader. Final question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we would like to have the bill killed. That's for sure. But in terms of a process certainly withdrawing the bill or referring it to a committee for public hearings at least gives the public a chance for the input that this government has denied them up until now. I want to put it to the Premier. If his party can't vote on the motion tonight and he can't get all of the members to vote for it, what are we paying your whip for?

Mr. Hancock: Well, the short answer is that he's not paying our whip.

But there is some dignity in this House, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we operate as a caucus. Yes, we get together to determine direction. Yes, we do listen to the public and to the feedback that we get as we plan the progress of bills. But we do not direct people in terms of how they vote, and we do not kill bills that are the property of the House. We do not withdraw bills that are the property of the House, so the options that would be available would be to leave a bill sitting on the Order Paper or to refer it to committee or to pass it. Those are the options available to the House, and I think we'll pursue one of those options.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's go on with question 6 without preamble to allow a maximum number of questions, starting with Calgary-Varsity, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Dementia and Mental Health Services

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring I asked the Health minister a question about AHS and the patient-care-based funding formula that had withdrawn resources from people with Alzheimer's and other dementia and mental health issues. To the same minister. It's Mental Health Week, and it's a good time to check in again. Can you provide us an update on changes made to fix the funding formula for care centres to ensure that people with Alzheimer's and other dementia and other mental health issues are adequately resourced?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is Mental Health Week, and I thank the hon. member for raising a question in that regard in question period today. We are involved now in a detailed review of both the policy for continuing care in Alberta and the funding formula that should be applied in order to achieve the outcomes we wish. For the group of Albertans that have dementia today, about 40,000 people across the province, they are being joined by about 8,000 of their fellow citizens each year who are being diagnosed with dementia. The funding formula must absolutely better reflect the demands that dementia poses for their care.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Following on your participation in the U.K. Dementia Congress, what actions are under way by Alberta Health to develop a provincial dementia strategy? Specifically, are you working with the Alzheimer Society or other community organizations to start work on a provincial strategy?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, both the Ministry of Health and Alberta Health Services are working with many, many stakeholders. There are two key areas of focus. The first, of course, is to delay the onset of dementia and other similar diseases as much as possible. The second is to support people who are living with dementia or Alzheimer's and their families, who are in many cases supporting them at home. I can tell you, for example, that we are in the midst of a three-year grant that's been provided to the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories to implement first link, which connects people who are newly diagnosed with dementia and their families to information resources . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: This question is to the Associate Minister – Seniors. Given the growing percentage of residents in care centres with dementia and associated depression or mental health issues, what steps are you taking to ensure adequate resources are being provided for the care of this population, and can we be ensured that the latest design research is being applied to the development of new care centres for this population?

2:10

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we can. We've built 3,000 accommodation spaces in this province in the last three years, and we're adding 2,000 more in the next two years. Virtually all of these facilities will have dementia care spaces, and there will be more to accommodate the increasing numbers of people that are suffering from dementia in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Electricity System Regulation

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AltaLink began as an \$850 million corporate entity that ratepayers of Alberta subsidized. AltaLink is now worth \$3.2 billion because Albertans pay for all their assets. Given that ratepayers pay cost plus for all new transmission assets and they guarantee AltaLink an annual income of roughly 9 per cent based on these assets, can the minister please explain what incentive AltaLink has to keep costs down?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is why we have the AUC. The AUC really regulates to make sure that prices are fair with regard to impacts on rates. This particular deal will go, as I said, through the federal government process and will go through the AUC to consider whether the sale of AltaLink will impact rates. That's important for us to make sure that we have competitive rates and affordable rates for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: I'm not talking rates. Listen now. Listen. Given that the price of electricity is less than 50 per cent of a utility bill and sometimes the cost of electricity is less than a third of a total bill and given that the real problems with consumers' bills are all those extra charges on the bill, now that Warren Buffett is buying AltaLink, will he be liable for some of these extra costs like transmission, or will consumers now subsidize one of the wealthiest men in the world?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, it will go through a federal process. It will go through the AUC. As we build out transmission for an increasing population here in Alberta, for about every \$1 billion that's spent, it is about an extra dollar to Albertans' utility bills. But making sure that costs are competitive and affordable for Albertans is first and foremost in this government's mind. That's why we have an MLA review committee doing work for us. They'll be coming forward to us to make sure that there are affordable rates for Alberta as we continue to build out a transmission system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: That answer is why you won't be government after the next election.

Given that SNC-Lavalin is going to profit \$2.4 billion thanks to Alberta's ratepayers and given that Alberta ratepayers will guarantee Warren Buffett, one of the wealthiest men in the world, an annual income of 9 per cent on all future transmission lines built, what's in this deal for Albertans, and who's looking after them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the AUC looks at all of these, and they look at every penny that is being charged to Albertans. They will make sure the rates are affordable and are fair to Albertans. That is why we have an arm's-length regulator to make sure that it's looking after

Albertans and the costs to Albertans for electricity and for transmission in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Highway 744 Landslide Damage

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Judah Hill slid in May last year, blocking highway 744. My constituents of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley use this route to get to Grimshaw and Peace River and back again. Although a temporary single-lane detour was established, travel through the area is neither safe nor reliable. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. When can my constituents expect restored access through the Judah Hill landslide area on highway 744?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. He's always a strong advocate on behalf of his constituency. As I'm sure the hon. member knows very well, the Peace region is located in an active landslide region. Alberta Transportation has been managing landslides along 744 for many years, dating back to 1985. As of February 5 motorists have had access to one-lane alternating traffic on Judah Hill. Repairs on Judah Hill are expected to be completed and open to two-lane traffic by the end of August.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the current status of the repairs to this important road, that my constituents rely on?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the crews are currently working on installing two separate retaining walls on Judah Hill to help stabilize the hill and protect against future landslides. We know this area is unstable, so we'll try and mitigate for future damage. Contractors are also continuing to rebuild sections of 744 that slid away during the slide of May 18, 2013.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to prevent these landslides from occurring again? It seems that they're happening year after year.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, along with the measures that I just mentioned previously, Alberta Transportation has installed slide monitoring equipment; you know, a permanent structure to monitor slide activity in that area. This equipment is able to measure slide activity and provide some advanced insight into future potential slides. These steps along with our extensive geohazard risk assessment program, which monitors slides across Alberta, will help give us advance notice of possible slides in the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

AltaLink Sale Approval Process

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we learned that Warren Buffett's investment company, Berkshire Hathaway, is seeking to acquire the Alberta transmission company AltaLink, but the optics of this deal are giving some Albertans cause for concern. Berkshire Hathaway owns a major rail company that would be directly affected by the approval of the Keystone pipeline, and Mr. Buffett has major influence within the White House. Keystone delays have been characterized by *Forbes* magazine as a "Buffett bonanza." To the Minister of Energy: how will you ensure that this company has the best interests of Albertans in mind before it takes over one of our major utilities?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, now, that's a good question. We continue to work to make sure that we're advocating for the Keystone pipeline. The Keystone pipeline and market access are very, very important to us. As I said earlier, the federal process will determine whether or not this sale goes through on the electricity side, but I can tell you that this government, this Premier, myself, our Minister of IIR, and other ministers are working very hard on market access to the United States, to the east, and to the west because that is job one for us.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that this major U.S. firm has its hands in many Alberta pots, from oil to rail, and ultimately must serve its investors first, is your government taking any concrete steps to ensure that this company supports the Keystone XL project and doesn't want to see it blocked, and if so, what are they?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we do is that we talk to a lot of people. Last week I was just in Pittsburgh and in New York – and another member was in DC – talking about the advantage of Keystone XL not only just for Albertans, Canadians, but for United States workers as well. We do everything we can to make sure Americans are aware of that, to make sure that the decision-makers in America are aware of that, and we will continue to do that. That side always complains about us going and making sure we're telling the Alberta story, but we will never stop telling that story.

Mr. Hale: Well, Mr. Speaker, we never complain about advocating for Albertans. We just want more than talk; we want something done.

Given that Berkshire Hathaway has to ultimately serve its investors first and considering that pipeline delays benefit its rail investments, what action would this government take if it was found out that any officials from this company were actively trying to influence the White House away from approving Keystone?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This line of questioning has sort of arrived in the wonderland area. The reality of this is that the investment proposal will receive Industry Canada review, a full review, as the Energy minister has indicated. It'll work through the AUC review process. Clearly, to try and draw a relationship between a proposed investment and Keystone advocacy goes beyond the purview of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Protection of Vulnerable Children

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government talks about putting children first, but the evidence doesn't support this. The child advocate this week highlighted negligence in relation to a newborn's death in a family with long-standing mental health and addiction problems. In addition, there's no sign this government will reduce, let alone eliminate, child poverty or address the high child and family poverty in relation to healthy development and learning or break the cycle of poverty. To the Minister of Human Services: how was Baby Annie's basic health and safety so neglected?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The advocate has come out with a report this morning. It's something that we will ensure that we review, and that's part of the reason why we have Bill 11 in front of the House today. I want to make it mandatory that when there's an advocate's report that comes out with specific recommendations, the government is obligated to respond and the quality assurance council is forced to move on those recommendations to make sure they're implemented so we can better protect Alberta's youth.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what new resources have you targeted to First Nations families to avoid these kinds of struggles?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, there's a variety of different challenges that we face with many, many families from a variety of different backgrounds when it comes to the care of children. There can be issues of abuse, issues of neglect, and everything that falls in between. It requires a real holistic solution based on the individual's needs to be able to help the family. For example, they could be mandatory addictions treatment processes and parental training processes that really deal with each family individually.

Dr. Swann: I guess the answer is: nothing new for First Nations.

When will you stop avoiding accountability for progress on child poverty and provide progress indicators on child poverty so you can be accountable?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, as we've said many, many times before, the fact remains that we are committed to ensuring that Albertans all across this province have opportunities to succeed. There are many, many reasons why people want to live in Alberta, and one of them is because of our strong, robust economic system. Everybody in Alberta has an opportunity to succeed. Where people need individual supports, we provide them. For example, in the area of child care – I know the member opposite is always speaking about that – we're the province that has a child care subsidy for people making \$50,000 or less.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Let's go on.

Task Force for Teaching Excellence Report

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this PC government's whole legislative agenda has been to attack public-sector workers. This week it's our teachers. With the release of the Task Force for Teaching Excellence report this PC government is making teachers the scapegoat for problems they've created: chronic underfunding, larger class sizes, fewer resources and supports, and crumbling infrastructure. To the Minister of Education: blaming teachers, the very people whom you forced to make do with less every year?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that is a complete mischaracterization of the task force report. In fact, excellence in teaching is fundamental to any good education system. Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world; ergo, we have excellent teachers. But we need to be better. We need to look forward. So the task force identifies areas of teaching excellence, excellence in educational leadership, and excellence in assurance and suggests that we look at, collaboratively with other groups in the system, how we can do a better job.

Mr. Bilous: I suggest you start by looking at your broken promises.

Mr. Speaker, given that this government was elected on a promise of stable funding increases for our schools and given that, instead, it's been cuts, ballooning class sizes, and school closures, to the Minister of Education: 40-student math classes and closing neighbourhood schools, is that your idea of excellence in education?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, excellence in education, as all the studies have shown, comes from how you can have a teacher who can inspire passion in the students to find what they're good at and to maximize their skills and abilities. That's excellence in teaching, and it can happen in any location. We strive to have great classrooms for our students. We're building 50 new schools and modernizing 70 other schools. That will be done. We are looking at how you can modernize the curriculum so that students can be prepared for tomorrow's problems. But at the root of it all it's excellence in teaching, and that's what the task force report is encouraging us to look at with all of our partners in the system.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Class size affects excellence.

Given that the real solution to improving education is to ensure that classrooms are properly funded, low student-teacher ratios, and adequate supports for all students and given that attacks on teachers are a distraction from the real elephant in the room, will the Premier admit that what's really standing in the way of excellence in our schools is this PC government?

Mr. Hancock: You know, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wants to talk about attacks on teachers. He's making it up, quite frankly. The task force report does not do that. The task force report outlines a number of key questions and makes some recommendations. The minister has indicated that those recommendations will be out there. The report will be out there. The groups, including the ATA, will be able to comment, will be able to participate, and then those comments will go to what's called TDPAC, which is a joint committee of the ATA and government appointees, in order to determine how we move forward in teaching excellence. That is fundamental work for the future of this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Protection of Vulnerable Children (continued)

Mrs. Towle: Baby Annie had traces of prescription drugs in her system and pneumonia caused by fecal contamination. Her mother was a known addict, and family violence was well documented. All six of her siblings were in government care, yet 17 hours after she was born, Baby Annie was sent home to her parents, and 14 days later Baby Annie was dead. What's shocking is that child services was involved with her parents for eight years, yet when Baby Annie was born, nobody thought that maybe it wasn't a good idea to send her home with these parents. To the Minister of Human Services: how do you explain yet another colossal systemic failure to protect two-week-old Baby Annie?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the report has come out, and we'll ensure that the government responds to every single one of the advocate's recommendations. The fact is that every child that passes away that is in contact with our system is a child too many. There is absolutely no question of that. This is a situation where we want to make sure that we are working very closely with other members of our government team to ensure that there's crossministry involvement with our children to better look after them.

Mrs. Towle: Given that issues of family violence and drug and alcohol abuse were well known and documented by child services and given that the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act prevented social workers from even conducting a safety plan prior to Baby Annie's birth, which could have identified ways to save her, Minister, if legislation is preventing safety plans which protect children just like Baby Annie, what is to say that another tragic death of a child won't happen again?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, those are some of the very questions that I'm asking right now myself. I think it's essential to see how we can work with families before there is a birth so that we can have the appropriate responses ready. There are, I'm told, some constitutional challenges that arise and have arisen in this area. The Supreme Court apparently has ruled in a few cases. Regardless of that, the question is: how can we ensure that we are better providing services to people on the front end so that we can help protect as many children as possible?

Mrs. Towle: I would be happy to work with the minister on how we remove that barrier.

Given that one of the recommendations coming out of the review of Baby Annie's death is that Alberta Health Services and children's intervention services should work together and develop a shared mandate for the well-being and safety of vulnerable children and given that this is the exact same recommendation that was made three years ago in the death of another young child, how many more children have to fall through the cracks and possibly die before the recommendations from three years ago are finally implemented?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, you'll find in the report that public health as well as Human Services did actually follow up with this particular family after the birth. They did have visits with the family as well. Regardless, it's a traumatic and very difficult situation that the child has passed away – there's no question of

that – and we're going to look for every way possible to see how we can work together to ensure that children are looked after.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Airdrie.

International Trade Strategy

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the hon. minister tell us: after the many government trips to Asia in the last year what tangible benefit do we actually have to show for that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Our strategy certainly is working in China and around the world. During one mission in Asia alone we connected 15 small and medium-sized enterprises and vetted those with high-quality investors in Beijing. We signed a letter of intent with Heilongjiang province on environmental and economic development co-operation, and we secured an exchange of petrochemical industry related visits and a commitment to solidify an MOU with Dalian, China.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how do you justify government-led missions to foreign countries like China when Alberta is already paying for a presence in these jurisdictions through its international office network?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, international missions provide opportunities to meet face to face with senior-level decision-makers and partners. It helps us to lay the groundwork for formal agreements that increase trade and investment and, of course, new areas of co-operation. Government-led missions also open doors for Alberta companies, and that provides them with opportunities for vital introductions, increasing visibility at international trade shows. Last year we actually facilitated more than 1,400 business introductions, resulting in 197 negotiations and follow-up meetings.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Alberta's market access efforts appear to mainly happen overseas. Tell me: how is the minister helping ordinary Albertans do business in emerging markets?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, exactly that way. We include Alberta businesses from right across this province in these international missions. We partner with economic developers to make sure that both urban and rural communities are included, and that's why we created the Small Medium Enterprise Export Council. Those councils are made up of business leaders from right across the province, and it's their expertise and passion that gives us advice on accessing markets around the world.

Assisted Reproductive Technology Policy

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, for millions of Canadians and Albertans having children is an essential part of them living a fulfilling life, yet 8 to 16 per cent of Albertans are unable to have

children due to infertility. In fact, over 12,000 Albertans are diagnosed with infertility every year. This means that in order to have a baby, a couple must often spend tens of thousands on assisted reproductive technologies to help them conceive. Many cannot afford these treatments. To the Health minister: will your government consider financially assisting couples trying to have a baby who are unable to without the aid of assisted reproductive technologies?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two provinces in Canada that have funded in vitro fertilization as part of their public health insurance program. One is Quebec, and more recently an announcement was made in Ontario about funding there connected with the most recent budget. We are looking at this technology in Alberta. I would agree with the hon. member that there are numerous couples in our province who are seeking and would benefit from assistance with this, but there are many serious questions to be asked beyond simply making the funding available.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the University of Alberta just released a 500-page report in February which studied, among other things, the cost of various government policies on assisted reproductive technologies and found that the current Quebec policy would actually save the Alberta government roughly \$3 million a year, mostly by avoiding expensive and dangerous pregnancy-related complications for older women with infertility issues who delay having a baby until they can finally afford private treatments. Minister, have you read this report, and if not, will you do so?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'm most certainly aware of the report, and I've been briefed on parts of the report. I haven't read it in its entirety. I'm sure, as the hon. member realizes, that the introduction of such criteria carries with it many serious questions that would have to be answered such as the age of a woman who would be eligible or not eligible to receive in vitro fertilization, the number of embryos that would be implanted, and many, many other serious questions. We are looking at this, we will move forward based on the evidence, and we're certainly sympathetic to Albertans who are affected.

Mr. Anderson: That's good to hear, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Quebec as well as the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, the Scandinavian countries, and most other large European nations have had a great deal of success with implementing a responsible policy to aid couples with assisted reproductive technologies and given that these policies have boosted birth rates, enabled tens of thousands to achieve their dreams, and actually saved the government money in the process, will the minister agree to have his ministry craft a similar policy for the thousands of Albertans who would greatly benefit from it?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as much as I appreciate the hon. member's interest in this topic, the absolute last reason that we would introduce such a policy in this province would be to save money. I've mentioned some of the criteria that need to be considered. A number of the countries that the hon. member mentioned do not have exclusively publicly funded health care systems. They have private systems, parallel systems, where these services are offered. In fact, the opposite is true with respect to the number of embryos that are involved in the procedure. Those can also lead to multiple births, which carry some serious complications of their own.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Temporary Foreign Worker Program Moratorium

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This last week I had a meeting with a group of 10 businesspeople from my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, who expressed great concern regarding the recent federal government announcement of a moratorium on temporary foreign workers in the food service sector. My question is to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. What can we as a provincial government do about this flawed federal action, in order to support our Alberta businesses and our valued temporary foreign workers program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, the actions taken by the federal government relative to TFWs will be devastating to Alberta's tourism industry and the Alberta hospitality and hotel and lodging industry. I do agree with the federal government that any and all jobs available in Canada ought to be made available to Canadians first, I agree that perpetrators and abusers of programs and TFWs ought to be dealt with harshly, but the majority of Alberta business owners have been using that program diligently, and the whole industry should not be punished.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that I am not the only MLA to have heard the hue and cry from business leaders, is there anything that we can do to help these temporary foreign workers, who contribute not only to our workforce but to our society as well?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, twofold, Mr. Speaker. As elected officials we should be expressing the opinion of Albertans and Alberta business owners to our federal government and making sure that they not only review the program and make it more conducive to TFWs and to businesses and to Albertans but at the same time not punish the same industry.

Relative to TFWs, Mr. Speaker, these are not numbers. This is not just an acronym. These are human beings that came to Canada with aspirations, and we must treat them with the dignity and respect that we treat all other workers with.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: can you give me some advice on what to tell my residents and my business leaders about how they can handle this flawed movement to get rid of temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, every time you pull up to a restaurant or perhaps if you have a nanny, a lot of the important work that's being done that allows the rest of the economy to function often is done by temporary foreign workers. I met with hundreds of business owners over the last week, and I am satisfied that they are doing what they possibly can to attract local employees, but simply none are available, particularly in areas of the province where the market is extremely tight. We have to communicate to the federal government how important these workers are to our economy and at the same time work really hard to engage Canadians in that employment.

Sage Grouse Protection Order

Mr. Barnes: The sage grouse is a very important species in southern Alberta and needs to be protected. The federal government has issued a protection order that affects 42 townships, causing unnecessary hardship on the oil, gas, and ranching industries. I firmly believe that not only does the sage grouse need to be protected, but the protection should come from the provincial government. A more effective and grassroots protection order could be issued by the minister of environment, allowing the province to take matters into its own hands. Will the minister commit to leading rather than following?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have had discussions with various landowners down in the south. We've talked to the Western Stock Growers' Association. We've talked to the Alberta Beef Producers. We are right now talking to the federal government. We're going to be sitting down with the state of Montana and the province of Saskatchewan to see if we can come up with a joint plan for that area of the province to protect the sage grouse.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some industry experts estimate the economic impacts of the federal protection order on the oil and gas industry to be \$200 million over the next two to three years alone and \$200 million more to the ranching industry over the next two to three decades, can the minister of environment understand just how important it is that the proper solution be established to avoid severely damaging southeastern Alberta's economy?

2:40

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very aware of the concern the member might have, but let's make it very clear. The federal government put this order in place without giving the province any warning at all. I think we were told at 4 o'clock the day before they put the order in at 8 o'clock the next morning. If the member across the way has an issue with somebody, he should be talking to his federal MP.

Mr. Barnes: Provincial inactivity, Mr. Speaker.

Given the strong precedent for state-level sage grouse protection orders coming from 11 states in the United States, is the minister not sorry that he failed Albertans by refusing to protect Alberta's environment and implementing a suitable protection order for the sage grouse?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the last time this member asked a question, I believe in private landowners' rights, so when we talk to stakeholders about what we're going to do to protect the sage grouse, we have to take that into account. We were working with industry, the oil and gas industry, and private landowners to put land aside for the sage grouse. Unfortunately, as I said, that member's MP supported an environmental order to move forward, and we now have the situation we're in today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for Oral Question Period has expired.

I do have a request to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Education it's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly one of his constituents, Mr. Dan Dennis, and four visitors from Belgium. Dan is the youth exchange co-ordinator for the Rotary Club of Athabasca and has been hosting Janne Franssens, a student from Belgium participating in the program. Janne arrived in Athabasca last August to participate in a one-year exchange through the Rotary Club of Athabasca. Janne's family is visiting her until May 9, and they are here today with us as well, including Dirk Franssens, Janne's dad; Erna Stevens, Janne's mother; and Jean Stevens, Janne's opa. During their time in our province they will be touring Athabasca, Edmonton, Jasper, and Banff and, without a doubt, will get to see why we are all so proud to be Albertans. It's my pleasure to have them here with us today, and I would ask that they please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us resume Members' Statements, starting with Sherwood Park, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mental Health Week

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans may be surprised to learn that 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness in their lifetime while the other four will know someone whose life is touched by mental illness. Yet despite this impact on almost all of us there is still a stigma attached to mental illness and still not enough open and frank discussion about mental health in general. This needs to change, and that's what Mental Health Week is all about.

This is the Canadian Mental Health Association's 63rd annual Mental Health Week, and it is from May 5 to 11. The theme is about encouraging us all to be more honest about how we really feel. Too often people will say that they're feeling fine when they're really not. Mental Health Week this year also aims to draw our attention to young women's mental health and the fact that women experience mental health problems differently than men. In fact, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association women are 40 per cent more likely than men to develop mental illness.

Our goal is to reduce the prevalence of mental illness and addiction in our communities through health promotion and prevention activities and to provide quality treatment for those who need it. We also aim to increase public awareness and understanding of addiction and mental health problems and to remove the stigma around mental health.

To show our support for Mental Health Week and increased mental health awareness, government members today are wearing a special Mental Health Matters pin with a green ribbon. We're proud to stand with Albertans to create more conversation around mental health and to reduce the harmful stigma that prevents too many people from getting the help they need. Let's all do our part

this week and throughout the year to raise awareness at home, at work, and in our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Liberation of the Netherlands

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks a very special anniversary for all members of the Alberta Legislature who have Dutch heritage. It marks the 69th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by the Allied forces, and for the family of the Member for Calgary-North West and for mine it reminds us of our history and our heritage.

Through the winter of 1945 Canadian soldiers battled German forces throughout the Netherlands until May 5, 1945, when freedom was once again returned to the Dutch citizens, including members of my family, after five treacherous years of occupation during World War II. That's when very many of my family members were released from the work camps in Germany. As the tulips, gifted to Canada by the Netherlands, bloom in Ottawa every spring, it's a renewed reminder of the liberation and the sacrifice of 7,600 Canadians who gave their lives for freedom in the Netherlands.

Growing up as the son of a Dutch immigrant, I learned at a very early age the importance of today, May 5, and of 1945. My parents would proudly fly both the Dutch and the Canadian flags to remind the people of Whitecourt that the VanderBurg household had not forgotten. Mr. Speaker, the Dutch people both here in Canada and in the Netherlands have not forgotten this historic day and the Canadian soldiers who freed them. We're thankful for their sacrifice, and we will never forget them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Supports for Children

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This PC government claims to put children first, but their track record says otherwise. This government has promised to eliminate childhood poverty within five years, yet they refuse to define poverty and duck accountability for no progress. We see that children are still 44 per cent of food bank recipients, the second highest in the country and growing annually. Where's the commitment to children with the growing deficit in child care? Government has known for a decade that in-migration goes with rapid development. They need to act now.

Basic strategies to reduce childhood poverty are lost on this government – full-day kindergarten, universal child care, a provincial tax benefit, and a breakfast program – basic changes made in other provinces that give children a head start in healthy development, break the cycle of poverty, and enable parents to participate in our economy. Hungry children cannot learn, be healthy, or meet their potential. No child in this province should ever start school without a good breakfast. High-risk families must be identified early, and supports, both material and psychological, must be provided to reduce the learning, emotional, and behavioural damage that predictably results. Prevention and early intervention in these families is well known to reduce suffering, improve societal functioning, and save government resources at a ratio of 7 dollars to 1.

Access for children to mental health services, long underfunded, continues to lose ground despite this government's late commitment of a 6 per cent funding increase this year. Rising school fees due to underfunding of our public education and busing fees are adding great stress to young families. An ideological resistance to reviewing our tax system, as the Alberta Liberals have been calling for for years, continues to compromise all of our future.

Inexplicably, this government also rejected other progressive actions such as promoting inclusivity through gay-straight alliances and reducing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake with a petition.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a petition with over 260 signatures collected by Nicole Ardell from Fort McMurray, who's seated in the members' gallery, with the aim of improving the immunization process for children in Alberta schools.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Bill 12

Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

This bill makes amendments to update several pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that Albertans continue to be well served. Making these amendments and modernizations will also help ensure that Alberta's legislation is consistent and clear. This bill includes amendments to the Government Organization Act, the energy statutes act, the relationship statutes act, the Charitable Fund-raising Act, the Vital Statistics Act, the Societies Act, the Health Information Act, and the Regional Health Authorities Act. I look forward to getting into the specifics in more detail during second reading. I'll pass the requisite number of copies to the Clerk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first one is from the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities, who state that

on behalf of the . . . Committee . . . we wish to let you know that ACCD supports Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, which ensures that every child in Alberta receives a visual assessment. It is of great importance that a child has an eye [exam] at an early age from a licensed vision health professional

as vision health is critical to a child's learning and future success.

My second tabling is from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, letting us know that in the month of May we can recognize Vision Health Month in the Legislature and share some of the following information with our colleagues. Mr. Speaker, I just note that one of the points that they want us to share in this tabling is: "Many serious eye conditions have no symptoms and can only be detected through a comprehensive eye exam – even someone with 20/20 vision may be at risk."

I'm tabling those copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I actually have two tablings here, the first being another 50 of the more than 4,000 postcards our offices have received asking this PC government to restore consistent, reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta.

I also have the appropriate number of copies of a letter that was written by the mayor of Calgary to the Premier, strongly urging to table Bill 9 or put it on ice, which just happens to be an amendment that's on this evening that the New Democrats did put forward a couple of weeks ago.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I understand you have several tablings.

Dr. Swann: Yes, I do. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The first is a tabling of an article from the *Edmonton Journal* regarding the issue of family care clinics and the province not reaching its target.

The second is an article from the *Calgary Herald* reporting on a bioethicist's comment relating to his support for mandatory immunizations as a method of saving lives.

The final one relates to an Alberta Federation of Labour commissioned legal study of Bill 10 and a rejection of the fundamentals therein by Mr. Murray Gold and a brief by the Alberta Federation of Labour from May 2014 also condemning the bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, did you have a tabling as well?

Mr. Bikman: I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of people have written to us about their concerns on the government's decision to open season on sandhill cranes. Jessie McKay wrote that her husband, Bill, was a lifetime naturalist and ornithologist who took these birds under his wing, so to speak, and observed, photographed, and documented their lifestyle, even followed their migratory patterns and journeys. She says that he would be devastated at this government's actions. Richard and Wendy Houle also wrote with similar concerns and sent a copy of the letter that they wrote to the ESRD minister. I have the requisite number of copies for those.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies on an earlier discussion we had in question period here, a question about Warren Buffett, which says, "I'd vote 'yes' on Keystone pipeline: Warren Buffett."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Are there others?

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 Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, a report entitled Childcare and School Vaccination Requirements, 2007-2008, prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists 2013 Annual Report; pursuant to the Agrology Profession Act the Alberta Institute of Agrologists 68th annual general meeting report, April 1, 2014; pursuant to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta annual report 2013.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are no points of order today, so we can move on.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 204

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014

[Debate adjourned April 14: Mr. Scott speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to pick up where we left off approximately two weeks ago, we were debating Bill 204 and discussing the intricacies of it. One of the points that I made during that debate was that there is already a section in the current Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 93, that does provide for fee waivers when it's in the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, carrying on where we left off, the policies need to be crafted in a manner that allow them to be manageable and straightforward in both implementation and in practice. A great deal of work needs to be put into ensuring that there is as little grey area and as few loopholes as possible. I think we can see that Bill 204 does not meet this criteria. As the bill stands in its present form, there is far too much ambiguity. The consequence is that the bill's result would be the exact opposite of its intended goal.

If we are making changes to how FOIP works, then presumably we are attempting to enhance accountability and transparency. Given the substantial holes exhibited by Bill 204 in its present form, the bill in fact introduces far more confusion and makes the process that much more opaque than it should be. It does not do anyone any good if the mechanism for accountability is itself unaccountable. It escapes me how a structure that could see unused FOIPs traded and swapped could possibly be accountable and transparent. Where is the oversight? Where is the fairness?

It is because of these glaring problems that no other provincial jurisdiction in Canada allows MLAs or other publicly elected officials to receive fee waivers, let alone a yearly allotment of FOIP requests. It is very easy to see why this is the case, Mr. Speaker. Besides obstructing transparency, the proposal in Bill 204 is simply impractical, not to mention costly. Allowing four free FOIP requests per year per member would have a substantial impact on the growing volume and cost of FOIP requests for the government of Alberta. Here I thought that the members opposite wanted to cut costs. Evidently, I was mistaken.

Let's mention some numbers here. In the last fiscal year the government of Alberta spent approximately \$9.5 million while responding to more than 4,200 access requests made under the FOIP Act. Of all those FOIP requests approximately \$125,000 of fees were assessed to applicants. After fee waivers only approximately \$100,000 was collected. Long story short, Mr. Speaker, that is a lot of money that must be spent by the government of Alberta to fulfill these requests.

We need to make sure that we are balancing getting information out and doing so in a responsible way to taxpayers. The fees amount to very little compared to the total cost. Bill 204 utterly fails to take this into account. Bill 204 would actually increase costs, as the numbers clearly indicate. The average current cost to process a general FOIP information request to the government of Alberta is approximately \$8,000.

Members of the party opposite should be subject to the same merit-based qualifying process to request a fee waiver as are members of the general public and all other groups who may be making requests based on things that are in the public interest. Why would we encourage a model that places the interests of one group over the other?

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive review of the FOIP Act is under way, one that involves extensive public consultations across the province. During the review all aspects of FOIP are being looked at, not just providing free FOIPs to MLAs. Needless to say, I cannot possibly support Bill 204 as the FOIP Act already permits fee waivers regarding information that is deemed in the public interest or if the applicant cannot afford to pay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

3:00

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first opportunity to speak to Bill 204. I do thank the member for bringing it forward. I think it's a great opportunity for us to talk candidly about problems about accessing information here in the province of Alberta. The freedom of information legislation as it stands has the effect of resisting our capacity to get information that we need to do our jobs, to find the information that helps to clarify bills, to help to clarify policy, which is the job that we are given here as part of the opposition. This information, that should be rightfully available to the opposition in order to do our jobs properly, is systematically sort of cloaked in the legislation and the capacity of each ministry to withhold information.

What's happened, then, when we have the freedom of information act is that everything is pulled back so much that we have to try to cast the widest possible net in order to find and make a more specific request so that we can get the information that we need. That's why a lot of these freedom of information requests end up being very, very expensive. It's not as though we are making a frivolous request. Instead, we are trying to look through this concrete wall that's been created by each ministry

and find those threads that we want to pull and somehow help to clarify the public interest. I think that the fee structure is in the way, but I think the lack of the spirit of openness is in the way as well.

I guess what I would like to see is for us to have an open discussion about the fee structure for FOIP requests, with the idea, if not of waiving part of the fees that are put onto these FOIP requests, then at least, perhaps, of reducing them or having a per caucus allotment that we can access as well. The problem, I guess, that I see – again, this is not to criticize the spirit of this bill brought forward by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I think just specifically that if you are handing out sort of these four free FOIPs, as the hon. member would suggest, then it would perhaps be better targeted if we just handed out a certain allotment of FOIP capacity to each of the opposition caucuses in general. I mean, I think that's what I would prefer to see. Certainly, the government side has the capacity to access that information anyway, so that's not a big deal. If we manage to hand it over by caucus, then it would allow our researchers and our members to do their jobs better and in a more focused manner, I suppose.

If we concentrated on making government more transparent and open in general through open-data initiatives or some other alternative means of data sharing, then I think that it would help to reduce FOIP requests, and I think that it would help a more honest, sort of less adversarial exchange of information like we have now. You know, we had the whole controversy here, Mr. Speaker, just before the constituency break about the possibility that FOIPs were being vetted or somehow looked at by the government side. I don't know what was really going on, but we could miss all of those controversies and misunderstandings by having more transparency and access through open-data systems for information in general, right?

I think we all watched the WikiLeaks phenomenon across the globe and other massive leaks of government information similar to the WikiLeaks. Those things only happen because there's that idea of a cloak of secrecy in the first place, that makes certain individuals want to push up against it. While some of that information might have been dangerous or inappropriate to have for public consumption, certainly when we're talking about the fee structure for the Ministry of Health in primary care networks, this is not top secret information that would somehow rank with submarine positions of the Americans or whatever. It's information that is quite mundane and run of the mill but very important for us in order to build the future of, say, community health initiatives, that we all need to have here in this province.

We as Alberta New Democrats would like to see that we have more open and transparent mechanisms available, that there is more provision for opposition parties to not be chasing down very, very expensive FOIP requests. I was looking at some of the ones we had recently. We had two requests to the Ministry of Education that came back with a combined total of more than \$14,000 – right? – and these were quite specific, well tailored. We had a Human Services one talking about PDD programming and service delivery. It came back at \$11,000. We had two FOIPs sent to Alberta Health in January that came back at \$1,674 and \$1,417 respectively and a third one at \$2,578. This is just very specific information on serious incidents to do with fatalities within care facilities. You know, we weren't asking for the moon here or casting out, as people like to say, on a fishing expedition, but just very specific.

These all add up, Mr. Speaker. I think that for the sake of the public interest, for the sake of transparency and good governance that we do reduce these fee structures somehow. I guess the for-free sort of voucher idea that the member brought forward – as I

said, it gives us, I think, a great opportunity to cast a light on how we need to reform this whole system. So for that I do very much appreciate his private member's bill being brought forward. I think that we all can learn and be edified from that.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also standing up in support of this Bill 204, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014. I fully agree with the Member for Edmonton-Calder. You know, the associate minister of – IT and T, is it? I was away.

Mr. Donovan: AT and T.

Mr. Kang: AT and T. Sorry.

He claims to have the gold standard, you know, when it comes to transparency. What I heard from the Member for Edmonton-Calder is that it's costing thousands of dollars to have FOIPs done. This bill is in the right direction. It will make it easier to maybe do FOIP requests by the opposition MLAs. It will be easier to have the fees waived, but it will still risk being a months-long process, which we go through every day anyway.

Anecdotal experience from previous fee-waiver requests shows that public-interest waiver requests can take more than three months. If the public body denies it, appeals to the Information Commissioner can take months as well. Although our researcher hasn't encountered that, it is theoretically possible to pay large fees for assessment and then appeal it. Who knows if the appeal will be successful or not? You know, the \$25 initial fee is very difficult to get waived, which buys only 150 dollars' worth of search time. I don't know what can be accomplished for 150 dollars' worth of search time. I don't know how far that will take us on the FOIP request.

3:10

In the experience of the Liberal researcher a public body either begins searches when they see our purchase order or when they see the Legislative Assembly cheque after rejecting our purchase order. FOIP officials that have no recent history with the Liberals are more likely to start searches only after receiving Legislative Assembly cheques. When search processing costs are estimated to be more than \$150, requesters are responsible for the full amount. If a requester can't afford to pay the full amount, then there goes the request. If the processing is estimated to cost \$149, the requester only pays \$25. Again, I stress the point that I don't know how much 150 dollars' worth of search can buy to do the FOIP request.

Definitely we should have some better mechanisms, maybe, in place so the opposition could properly do its job. I don't know what that entails, why it costs so much to do a FOIP request. This bill is definitely a step in the right direction. Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak in favour of something so vital and critical to democracy and to good government. It's clear that in a situation like we have, in a unicameral governing body where the majority

rules and where they clearly, contrary to what was said earlier, vote en bloc, because they are the majority, they can stifle the free distribution of information or the free discussion of bills like this. It's important that we're able to get the information that this would make available in a freer and easier way.

It helps MLAs do their jobs. We must remember that each of us represents a constituency, not a party, and we represent the constituents in our area or riding. It's our job to do the best that we can to keep them informed or to help them find answers to questions or issues that they raise with us. Bill 204, by allowing each MLA four public-interest fee waivers, would help us do that job. The job of the opposition, obviously, is to oppose legislation that we think is inadequate or heading in the wrong direction or is incomplete and to propose amendments that will make it stronger. Our job also, of course, is to expose error and corruption and waste, and of course many people are telling us that we're doing a good job of it. This will allow us to do a much better job of it.

We notice that it's always the catalyst that provokes change. It's like, you know, my grandson: I won't do it again, mommy, now that you caught me. But until you're caught, you show no inclination or no initiative to make this change on your own, which indicates questionable integrity, in fact a lack of it, in our opinion. Allowing this information to be more freely and readily available will allow us to do our job. If this government, in fact, votes against this legislation en bloc, then they are kind of making a mockery of their famous gold standard of transparency and accountability. [interjections] Yeah. Well, I'm here to say that it's pyrites, which you all know is fool's gold. Anybody who believes that this is real gold would be foolish if they claimed it or if they expected anybody else to believe it.

The costs that the government incurs . . .

An Hon. Member: The pyrites standard.

Mr. Bikman: That's right. The pyrites standard. We'll change that. I wish I'd have thought of that.

The public interest most commonly used by the opposition and the media – there are three main criteria in deciding if something is in the public interest:

Will the records [that are being sought, the information that will be gained] contribute to the public understanding of, or to debate on or a resolution of, a matter or issue that is of concern to the public or a sector of the public, or that would be, if the public knew about it?

Now, earlier today we had the Premier indicate that his apology was for not communicating better. He was sort of apologizing on behalf of Albertans for not understanding what the government was trying to communicate or say. So if you really listen to what he was saying, there was no apology at all. It was an indictment of Albertans for not getting it.

Well, the reason that you've been getting it is that we've been finding out what you've been doing all these years and exposing it. The job of the opposition, done properly, is to expose this kind of information that we obtain to the public by, in fact, having things publicized by the media, by the proceedings of question period or other actions that we take in this House being broadcast or reported on. While you don't value our opinions very much, you value the public's opinion a great deal, and when we expose the things that we've discovered through FOIP, what we're doing is exposing you to public opinion, and in the court of public opinion you consistently are found guilty. You change but only when you're exposed.

The second item of criteria. "Is the applicant motivated by commercial or other private interests or purposes, or by a concern

on behalf of the public or a sector of the public?" Well, of course, MLAs are guided by the ethics that indicate that we are required to only seek information that is in the public interest, so by allowing MLAs access to four free FOIP requests, we're actually allowing the government to function at a higher level and in a more effective and cost-effective way. Correcting things that are wrong is far more costly than doing it right the first time. I think that all of us that have grown to the ages that would qualify us to be here, with the experiences of our lives, would know that. If you've got time to do it over again, you had time to do it right the first time. If the risk of exposure is greater, you're less likely to do things that you think might be hidden or swept under the carpet. It's our job to know what corners of the carpet the dust is under and which closets the skeletons are hiding in and where the dead bodies are.

The third thing is, "If the records are about the process or functioning of government, will they contribute to open, transparent and accountable government?" I think that's critical. That's absolutely critical, especially when the government has so successfully deluded the public for so many years. It was interesting during our first few months in this Chamber to notice the deer-in-the-headlights look of this government when it found itself being attacked in a credible way by true small "c" conservatives, a constituency that you'd abandoned. All of your guns were pointing to the left, a sort of political Maginot line, if you will, and you couldn't turn them back around. You had this "What's happening?" deer-in-the-headlights look. It was humorous, but it's made government better. It's made you better, whether you'd like to admit it or not, because you've been held accountable, and up till now nobody really had been able to do that.

We need to have this. This is a good bill. It's a good proposal, and if you're sincerely interested in helping our province be better governed, you will allow this bill to pass.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. This bill proposes to provide all Members of the Legislative Assembly with four annual complementary, or free, freedom of information and protection of privacy, or FOIP, requests. Of course, we know that they are anything but free.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is not only bad politics; it's bad policy. A lot of time and money goes into administering every single FOIP request. On average it costs approximately \$8,000. Multiply that by four and by 87 members, and you get to a grand total of \$2.7 million that taxpayers could potentially be on the hook for at the end of the day. It is extremely unsettling that the party opposite finds it appropriate to use their position as MLAs to try to put into place legislation that would give them, for the lack of a better term, freebies, but that is exactly what Bill 204 proposes. Perhaps the correct term we are looking for here is "entitlement."

3:20

Mr. Speaker, do not get me wrong. I believe the FOIP process is a mechanism that definitely encourages transparency and accountability, and I appreciate all the hard work and effort that goes into producing FOIP requests. However, a FOIP request

could also be used to pressure public bodies into releasing confidential and sensitive information. Let me point to an incident that occurred after the 2012 provincial election involving the county of Stettler. The county was accused of contravening the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act by using staff time to promote a candidate running against the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. Instead of first approaching the county of Stettler to request information in a diplomatic manner, the party opposite chose instead to send frivolous and nonspecific FOIP requests. In other words, instead of good old-fashioned communication and co-operation the party opposite declined to reach out to the county in a respectful and diplomatic manner.

Now, Mr. Speaker, how can the members across the aisle, who pride themselves on being focused at a grassroots level, use their status as MLAs to frivolously fish for nonspecific, general information that costs municipalities, public bodies, and taxpayers time and money?

In an article from the *East Central Alberta Review* that was published on March 6, 2014, Councillor James Nibourg also discussed the incident. The article stated, “FOIP requests are a double-edged sword” due to the sensitivity of the information being requested, one that often requires public bodies to engage in a balancing act. Nibourg also went on to state, “Good communication is the key to prevent these situations” from occurring. The article also noted that the county of Stettler reached out to the Official Opposition on several occasions. In another article, by the *Stettler Independent*, titled County Faces Election Alberta Inquiry, county Reeve Wayne Nixon stated that they even reached out to the Leader of the Official Opposition and did not receive a response.

Mr. Speaker, in January of this year Elections Alberta ruled that the county of Stettler did not violate financing bylaws in the 2012 election, vindicating representatives of the county. Nonetheless, officials were disappointed by the way the party opposite handled the situation. In January of this year the *Stettler Independent* ran an article focusing on Elections Alberta’s ruling, one in which the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills was quoted as saying:

We’ve done many, many FOIP requests, and generally speaking, people are just forthcoming and provide the information. Most often, there’s nothing there, but when someone does fight it, that’s when we tend to think there may be something there.

Yes, I will table all the documents tomorrow in the House.

Now let me focus on the statement “Most often, there’s nothing there” because, Mr. Speaker, I believe this really does speak volumes when discussing Bill 204. If, as the hon. member alludes, there’s mostly nothing there with regard to the completed FOIP request, why go out of your way to malign the good reputations of elected officials and cost all taxpayers millions of dollars a year? Are we to believe that Bill 204, given the experience of the county of Stettler, brings more transparency and accountability? We are talking about governmental policy that could affect everyone in the province. Moreover, we are talking about a policy that would place undue cost on taxpayers and municipalities in particular.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 would contribute nothing to building a stronger Alberta. On the contrary, it would promote a divisive environment, foster a culture of distrust, and undermine the hard work of our public servants. Nothing positive comes about from witch hunts. FOIP requests not only take up public time, but they also draw on public money, money that the members opposite believe they are entitled to. Members of the public must pay the whole or a portion of the FOIP administration fees of their requests, so why create a two-tiered FOIP system that places the

interests of MLAs over those that they are elected to serve? Again, this not only illustrates the lack of rationale behind Bill 204 but also the Official Opposition’s lack of understanding regarding good governance. Who’s to say that these complimentary FOIP requests would not be marred by partisan motivations or clouded by ideological bias having nothing to do with policy of the day or government matters or simply be used for personal attacks on the members?

We must protect the efficacy and integrity of the FOIP process, and I do not believe that this bill would result in either. I will not stand in support of this bill, and I encourage all of my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, this being a private member’s bill, 29(2)(a) is not available, for those of you who have written. Also, based on the one list I’ve received and the notes and other hand signals and so on I’ve just received, here is the speaking order for the remaining half-hour or so of the bill. I have Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Lesser Slave Lake, and then, if time permits, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the Associate Minister of Seniors, and Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, point of clarification.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the Wildrose.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Anderson: According to section 13(2) – I just wanted a point of clarification from you – in this House when we’re doing private members’ business or bills in general, we usually rotate between opposition and government. In this case that wasn’t the case. Could that happen?

The Speaker: Thank you for asking. In fact, we have had two speakers from the Wildrose, including the sponsor, which you should include in your thing, and then I recognized the second one there. Now I’m recognizing two in a row over here, and then we’re alternating back and forth based on the order in which they were received. I go by the notes, and that’s why I have times written on all the notes, when they were received. I hope that clarifies that.

Let’s go. Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Debate Continued

Ms Kubinec: Thank you. I rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Bill 204 proposes to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, or FOIP Act, in order to waive FOIP fees for all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Today I would like to focus my remarks on hard-working people, our many talented public-sector employees who contribute their skills to serving our province. These important people work on the front lines and behind the scenes, utilizing their expertise to ensure that programs run effectively and that Alberta remains at the forefront of public service. In addition to providing much-needed front-line services, there are a number of skilled independent officers that work to provide greater accountability and transparency in government. For instance, the Auditor

General is responsible for auditing every government of Alberta ministry and department, providing direction and oversight to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta, or OIPC, is also an independent office of the Legislature, that was established in 1995.

As proposed in Bill 204, the OIPC, which provides oversight for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, would also provide oversight of these four annual and complimentary FOIP requests. Currently, as the OIPC's 2012-2013 annual report states, the office employs a complement of 40 staff in two offices, one in Calgary and one in Edmonton. Over the course of 18 years the OIPC has become a caretaker of privacy in the province, aiding in the resolution of privacy complaints and concerns, conducting investigations, and releasing the office's findings.

Mr. Speaker, it is these vital, nonpartisan, and independent public-sector workers, both behind the scenes and on the front lines, who help to make our province the success it is. I am grateful to them, and I commend them for all their hard work. That is why I find it truly mind-boggling that the member opposite would implement the amendments that are proposed in Bill 204.

Wasn't it the Leader of the Official Opposition who called for the random elimination of at least 50 per cent of our province's public-sector managerial workers? Yes, you heard me correctly: 50 per cent of all managers. Some of us might have a hard time recalling this statement, so let me refresh your memories.

3:30

On February 20, 2013, Global Edmonton quoted the Leader of the Official Opposition as saying, "You'd need to cut management by 50 per cent if you're actually serious about reforming the way the public service works." Reforming the way the public sector works. Hmm. That's pretty rich coming from members across the aisle who cry foul when independent officers such as the Ethics Commissioner rule out of their favour.

In terms of coming up with the 50 per cent figure, one would question what research was cited as reference to such an arbitrary number. Does the party opposite have some kind of independent, nonpartisan evidence that supports this figure? Does the party opposite appreciate the high level of responsibility and pressure that managerial staff take on in these roles? Frankly, Mr. Speaker, it does not appear so.

How can the Leader of the Official Opposition propose to cut the public sector's managers by 50 per cent while another member proposes to increase the workloads of the public-sector workers, including managerial staff, with the allotment of four complimentary FOIP requests per year? Doesn't this proposition come across as a little contrary? One would think that common sense would prevail in these situations, but somehow common sense doesn't always prevail.

Mr. Speaker, the FOIP process can be an onerous one that involves drawing greatly on public reserves and resources, public time, and, of course, public money. High-level and highly sensitive information is involved, needing the expert authority of managerial government workers to deal with the given FOIP requests. If, as the Leader of the Opposition stated, managerial staff were to be cut by such a large margin and Bill 204 became law, how would a given public body be able to effectively aid in completing capably a given FOIP request, let alone the possibility of simultaneous requests?

I believe that this is not only a recipe for disaster but another example of the party opposite's poorly-thought-out policies. Call me a mind reader, but I can see the adverse effects this broad cut

of public-sector managers would have on the timely services and programs our province currently offers, ones that people such as our seniors need and appreciate. Like a trickle-down effect, I could see how some of those who called for such a random cut complain when a public body's FOIP completion is taking too long and forget that it is our valuable public-sector employees who would be hard-pressed to complete the FOIP for a variety of reasons.

Now, it might be a long shot, but perhaps a junior public-sector worker might need to draw on the knowledge and skill of a more experienced colleague, or what if there just aren't enough people available to complete the requests in a timely manner, leading the given public body to have no other choice but to hire new employees to help process the FOIP requests? This, Mr. Speaker, is a reality that may come about with the amendments proposed in Bill 204. Given that the independent office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has a current complement of 40 staff and if you take into account the potential amount of extra resources that would potentially need the oversight of the OIPC, there could be a need for the office to hire more staff to deal with the potentially large barrage of requests from MLAs.

Once again, does the party opposite really want to cut the public sector's managers by 50 per cent given this very real prospect, and does the party opposite really want to minimize the hard work that all of our public-sector workers, regardless of title, provide on a daily basis by making such sweeping comments to the media? Generalizations founded on arbitrary figures have no useful place in any objective analysis or constructive debate, but once again I'm not surprised and have come to expect this level of rhetoric.

I thank the hon. member for allowing me to be able to comment on all our hard-working public-sector employees, and I stand firmly against Bill 204. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, just before Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock spoke, I indicated there would be about half an hour left. In actual fact, I thought we had a total of about an hour and five minutes, but we actually had 105 minutes in total at that point. So this debate can go on, if you wish, until approximately 4:40, which means we should be able to get in all the speakers on the list.

Let me move on hastily to Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise to support my colleague and speak in favour of Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014. This bill, proposed by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, will allow four public interest fee waivers per year so MLAs can hold this government to account.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Over the past few years FOIPs have become the major source of information on how this government conducts its business. Despite having created a ministry to oversee and assure government accountability, transparency, and transformation, little has been done to make progress on any of these areas, so it is on the backs of opposition MLAs to find the truth and hold them to account.

Mr. Speaker, AT and T: I'll give them one out of three that they've gotten somewhat right. There's certainly not a whole lot of accountability, there isn't any transparency, as we've seen with the way they approach Bill 9, but I will give them transformation. They have transformed themselves into something. We're just not

sure what, and I'm not sure that the members across the aisle from us are sure just what they are or what they represent now.

One of these methods is through FOIP. The Wildrose believes in open, transparent, and accountable government. Granting fee waivers to MLAs is a step towards a more open government. FOIP can be a costly process, which can reach totals in the thousands of dollars on any given issue. Despite an already existing clause that allows for fee waivers in the public interest, valid applications which meet the requirements are frequently denied.

Mr. Speaker, members in this Legislature are given limited budgets to manage our offices and ensure that we are able to effectively communicate with our constituents and Albertans. Cost cannot be an excuse to deny access to information. This bill will correct that and allow MLAs to pursue issues for their constituents that otherwise would have proven too costly.

The government wants the public to believe that this bill would result in frivolous applications and an increased cost burden on the public dime. I argue, Mr. Speaker, that even if costs increase, this is a small price to pay for increased public knowledge and democracy. However, I sincerely doubt this will make a noticeable impact on the budget given that backbenchers on the other side are unlikely to collect and expose any data on government waste or abuse. Both points mute this government's fearmongering.

The last comment I would like to make is a comparison between Alberta and our federal counterparts, where fees are not assessed by the government of Canada under access to information. In fact, all that is required is a \$5 application fee. This is in sharp contrast to Alberta, which charges \$25 per application and then any fees over \$150 for records.

I will close with a couple of quotes, Mr. Speaker. Information is the lifeblood of democracy; without adequate access to key information about government policies and programs, citizens and parliamentarians cannot make informed decisions, and incompetent or corrupt governments can be hidden under a cloak of secrecy: that was by our Prime Minister, Stephen Harper.

I'll also quote:

- The right of access to information is precious. No government should ever oppose it or impede it on the basis that it is too expensive, too time consuming or only the "trouble-makers" use it.
- Accountable governments are better governments.

That was spoken by Frank Work, the former Alberta Privacy Commissioner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014, leaves me scratching my head. The intent is essentially to entitle elected officials to freebies, freebies that allow each and every MLA four free FOIP requests per year. I'm still scratching my head because the opposition have always been such strong proponents of no freebies for MLAs – it doesn't matter where they belong – and are always talking about how they could cost-save and make sure that we balance our budget. I'm still scratching. They seem to be losing that specific value which seems to be very important to us.

3:40

Between fiscal responsibility and gross hypocrisy vis-à-vis certain buzzwords such as "entitlement" and "bureaucracy" I really am at a loss as to where I should begin, Mr. Speaker. First, I

would like to remind members in this House that responses to FOIP requests do not materialize out of thin air. I would like to think that the members opposite know this, but they do not seem to appreciate the full extent of resources, manpower, and tax dollars that are consumed in fulfilling these requests to the high standards we rightly expect. Completing FOIP requests can potentially cost thousands of dollars, not to mention the work hours that must be allocated. Entire warehouses of enormous filing cabinets bursting with documents must often be sifted through.

As the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has even said himself, it is often the case that nothing noteworthy comes of these requests anyway. So why Bill 204? It does not take a degree in economics to piece together that this is time and money that would be better spent on something that does yield results as opposed to contrived outrage, things such as to increase dollars for FCSS, to buy my hospital helipad or my road to Peerless/Trout Lake.

Given that the beneficiaries of four freebie FOIP requests would be MLAs, I simply cannot believe that this bill amounts to anything more than corporate welfare or, dare I say it, Mr. Speaker, entitlement. Curious indeed coming from the members opposite, who make a habit of sermonizing about entitlements for those who don't need it. I may not have a PhD in logic, but I know contradiction when I see it, and so do Alberta taxpayers. The members opposite should give more credit to Albertans. You can't complain about dollar spending and then start asking for free dollars for yourself. Albertans certainly can scratch their heads here, too.

The point that brings some concern to me is that partisanship may be playing a part in this request although I hope not. Not long ago the county of Stettler was unfairly targeted by what many would deem to be a witch hunt that borders on the McCarthy-esque. Rather than being approached as equals and as fellow nonpartisan officials of the people of Alberta, council members were subjected to an aggressive and confrontational assault on their integrity. Members opposite heavy-handedly resorted to FOIPing the information they wanted, convinced that political activities were being conducted on council time. For the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, council members may have had sympathies that lay with a party that is not the Official Opposition.

Obviously, we all need to stress that political activities should not be funded on the public's time, but predictably this was not the case at all in the county of Stettler. These are people of integrity who – surprise, surprise – were completely innocent of what their accuser tried to intimidate them for. I am sure these individuals would have gladly provided all of the information requested of them had they been approached in the spirit of goodwill and civility and probably at very little or no cost. Indeed, they have even been recorded as saying exactly this.

This indicates a very troubling pattern, Mr. Speaker. It represents a prioritization of partisan drama over public policy discussion. It represents a brand of lowest common denominator politics, and we should want no part of it. I believe it has no place in our province.

I fear that Bill 204 threatens to drag a style of crass partisanship into the realm of FOIP. I do not want that FOIP process politicized because it would undermine the very legitimacy of that process. FOIP should be fair, transparent, and accountable to all citizens of this province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we should continue to have the gold standard but even more so, I would say, a platinum standard. When requests are being used in order to obtain politically expedient ammunition such as in the county of Stettler, that's a problem.

I am a strong supporter of getting information to those who need it. I am also a strong believer that FOIP can do this. As much as I love – or I should say: I like – the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and as much as I support FOIP for good reasons, not for witch hunts, I cannot in good conscience support Bill 204 because of the price attached to something like this for taxpayers and all Albertans and the fact that the dollars can be better used in projects I named earlier. I believe that we can do great things if we do it right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an amazing thing to hear the members of this PC government talk about saving money. My God, I like it. You should applaud yourselves. Unfortunately, the money that we receive to FOIP this government, that tries to keep information secret, goes right back into general revenue. I don't know how they come across with this waste of money. The fact is that we have real problems with our FOIP process, and it's a phony gold standard that even the government side of this House mocks when the member gets up and actually calls it a gold standard. It's pathetic. We rate as one of the worst provinces in all of Canada when dealing with FOIP. That's terrible. That's absolutely terrible. We come in at number 12. Holy cow. Can you imagine that? That's the gold standard they measure themselves by.

I will tell you in all seriousness, Mr. Speaker, that the town of Sundre, the doctors in Sundre who are trying to fund privately the helipad for the hospital down there have to FOIP the information because the government won't release the details so they can actually build the proper helipad. How insane. This would save the government money if they could only get the dimensions and the engineering drawings so they could actually fund it and build it with private funds. This government won't release the information so they can do it.

It's a good thing that these PC MLAs want to prevent FOIP from going through although the Member for Banff-Cochrane – I have no idea where he comes up with confidential or private information being released. That's the damned law in the first place. [interjections] I withdraw the word.

Now, dealing with the importance of FOIP, I mean, the whole idea of children dying while in the custody of this government would never have been revealed unless we went through an entire process of FOIPing this government.

I will tell you this, Member for Banff-Cochrane, who keeps pointing, and the member for – all of them. Whatever. The idea of taxpayers' dollars going to PC fundraisers is fundamentally wrong. That should never happen. That's what we discovered in FOIP. That's concrete, cogent evidence. That's not frivolous. That should be criminal, and people are getting away with it. They only started stopping that when we started exposing that. Taxpayers' dollars should not go to any party. They don't go to the NDP, they don't go to the Liberals, and they don't go to the Wildrose. Why should this PC Party get taxpayers' dollars because people are misusing their expense accounts? They shouldn't. So there you go.

Let's be real. They're embarrassed. They don't like FOIP. Otherwise, we would never have gotten to the bottom of the misspending on the use of government planes. I'm sorry, but that actually cost you a Premier. You don't like it, and I understand why you don't like it.

You don't like the fact that the people of this taxpaying province found out that you were building an apartment in an office building of the gold standard. That made them pretty upset. We would never have found out about it unless we FOIPed it. How could the cabinet have told us about it? They said that they didn't know. So we had to FOIP it to find out who knew. But this idea that every time we ask for information it costs thousands of dollars is bogus, and it's false. Sometimes we ask for one piece of information that only requires somebody to go to the filing cabinet and pull it out, information that should be in the public sphere to begin with, and this government does everything it tries to do to prevent that information from coming forward so they don't get embarrassed.

All we're asking for are two passes per MLA so that at least they can do some things. I tell you that from this bill that is proposed, we could go out into the public, and people who are doing FOIPs in the public can actually FOIP public information in the public interest without cost. This is information that should have been readily available in the first place, and this government has done everything to prevent it from going out there.

3:50

The arguments that this government party has been making, that somehow this is irresponsible or that it's a witch hunt – I'm sorry, but this FOIP has done one thing and one thing only. It has exposed this government for a tremendous amount of misspending. It has exposed this government for irresponsibility. I understand why they don't like it. They can vote against it, which they will, but the fact is that the public has a right to information, and that's all we're asking for when we file a FOIP. The information that we are asking for is information they are entitled by law to have. We're asking for nothing more than that. This whole idea that we're giving out confidential information: maybe somebody should read the FOIP Act before they make such statements or accuse some other members of being frivolous. There's no such thing as getting confidential information or any information that violates the FOIP Act. It's just not done.

But I will tell you this. When I actually had the chance to do a little bit of FOIP information, lo and behold, I stumbled upon that there were private investigators hired by this government to follow citizens around during a hearing process. [interjections] Oh, they don't like that one, Mr. Speaker. They don't like that one at all. Boy, did the government backtrack on that one and hide. That's what happens all the time. They do this.

This idea that it's frivolous – I will tell you what is just a tragedy. You can hide information, and then what happens is that it starts to, I think, snowball. I do not believe that any member on the other side intentionally wants to do harm or intentionally wants to violate the law or intentionally wants to be disrespectful of the taxpayers. The problem is that when there's no accountability, what you get is people going off the deep end, a government going off the deep end, doing things like hiring private investigators to follow citizens around in a hearing process, building apartments up in a renovated government building, using government planes for PC Party business, and then using taxpayers' dollars to fund a PC Party fundraiser. Those are all fundamentally wrong, and those we proved all through the FOIP process, yet these members here want to claim that that's somehow frivolous. Maybe they should claim that they think it's their right to do that. But it's not their right. That's why they're so low in the polls today. They don't particularly like that, and I can understand them being angry about that.

When we deal with these issues that are of significant impact on the public interest, things like the whole electricity issue, we can't

get information unless we FOIP that information. The whole issue of the cost-monitoring committee: we would not have known that all these transmission lines, to the letter every one of them, have more than doubled in cost compared to the original estimates. Nobody has a track record that bad. How can that possibly be? Why can't they get the estimated costs even remotely correct? One or two should come out correct. Here we have to deal with information that took years to extract through the FOIP process, and we still have a government that has not reacted to the information to improve the situation. With this, how can that even be deemed frivolous when it can save not just millions but billions of dollars if we can only get the government to act?

We have this situation in many categories, whether it's health care, whether it's dealing with PDD, or whether it's dealing with the expenses from municipalities that would use taxpayers' dollars in a campaign to help one particular party. All of that is fundamentally wrong. When we expose this, it forces the government to act and deal with it. Otherwise, they get to play this game of denial, head in the sand: "We won't act on it. We don't have to act on it." It seems this government only acts when it's embarrassed.

What happens in the FOIP process? They take a Deputy Premier, who says: give us all that information before you release it, legal information that should be released, so they can vet it before they release it to the public so that they're not embarrassed.

We have a bill that's coming forward here. All it says is that we have a right to the FOIP process, and we're asking for two freebies, two passes, so that we don't have to spend taxpayers' dollars. [interjections] Now, let's talk about the freebies because I like the heckling that goes on. The money that we are allocated in this caucus that we apply to FOIPs goes right back into the general coffers, the general revenue, of this government. It goes nowhere else unless someone over there is willing to step up and say that you're putting it in your own pockets. I don't think so. It's going right into general revenue. It comes right out of tax dollars, comes over to this side, and goes right back to you.

We want the information you should have given to us in the first place. I don't understand where you're coming off on this: it's costing millions and millions of dollars. Sometimes we have to just go out and ask for one sheet of paper, as I stated earlier. That's all we're asking for, and it takes months to get it because this government does not want to release it. That's a tragedy. That is something that I think this government has to stop doing, and that can still occur even with this . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The time has expired.

There's no 29(2)(a).

I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to speak to Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Bill 204 proposes to provide all Members of the Legislative Assembly with four freedom of information and protection of privacy, or FOIP, requests a year, to be overseen and approved by the Privacy Commissioner.

As my fellow hon. members have already mentioned, the FOIP Act was introduced in Alberta in 1994 following an extensive public consultation process by an all-party panel. The act we abide by today reflects the recommendations of the all-party panel as well as the input of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, this legislation is very

much the cornerstone of an open, accessible, accountable government for the people of Alberta. Openness, accessibility, and accountability are three principles that this government prides itself on.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

In the last year the government of Alberta has made tremendous progress in the programs, services, and information provided to Albertans. We implemented whistle-blower protections and expense disclosure requirements, the most stringent in the country. We committed to the proactive and routine release of information through salary and severance disclosure policy. Madam Speaker, this policy, as the Member for Lesser Slave Lake said, is the platinum standard and the first in the country, I might add, that builds upon our province's history of open disclosure and current availability for MLAs, deputy ministers, and senior executives through each ministry's annual reports.

However, the sponsor of this bill is proposing to take advantage of and infringe upon the openness and transparency solely for partisan means. As it stands, the FOIP Act provides for a formal method of requesting information held by public bodies which is not available by other channels. These public bodies include the government of Alberta, school jurisdictions, municipalities, Métis settlements, postsecondary institutions, drainage districts, irrigation districts, public libraries, housing management bodies, police services, police commissions, and health care bodies.

Madam Speaker, today I'd like to highlight the five fundamental principles upon which this important act is based. These five fundamental principles, I would argue, will be compromised by the proposed Bill 204. The first principle on which the FOIP Act is based is to allow any person a right of access to the records in custody or control of a public body, subject only to limited and specific exceptions. This principle allows any person to access records, whether that be e-mails, correspondence, or government documents. The opposition, however, has often used this principle to benefit politically. If the opposition were really looking for valuable government information, wouldn't it be easier and less costly for them to just ask the ministers or their offices for that information? You just have to ask.

This fundamental principle is undermined by the opposition in their quest to mine out information for personal attacks against members of this government. Moreover, this abuse of taxpayer dollars for personal means is not something, certainly, that most of us can support. In the last fiscal year the government of Alberta noticed a significant increase in the volume of general requests received. There was a 463 per cent increase . . .

Mr. Rodney: How much?

Mr. Quest: . . . a 463 per cent increase, hon. minister, for general information from elected officials, 463 per cent up from the previous year, 2012-13.

Given that opposition MLAs are protected under the FOIP Act, it's safe to say that this increase may be due to the sheer volume of requests from opposition MLAs and not from members of government, the caucus, or the public. That would be just too much of a coincidence.

4:00

Madam Speaker, the second principle is founded to control the manner in which a public body may collect personal information from individuals, to control the use that the public body may make of that information, and further to control the disclosure by a

public body of that information. Providing MLAs with the ability to conduct four free – and they're not free. They are at the taxpayers' expense. I know Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said that it goes right back into general revenue. Well, of course it doesn't. It goes into general revenue, but there's a significant expense. There are significant administrative costs to doing all this. So no, it just doesn't go out of one place and into another. Having spent 20 years in business, I fully understand the costs of doing business, and there's a significant cost to this service. It does not just go out of one pocket and come back into another. So having these four free – and nothing is free – FOIP requests annually would have substantial impacts on the growing volume and costs of FOIP requests to the government of Alberta.

The third principle upon which the act is based is to allow individuals the right of access to information about themselves which is held by a public body subject only to limited and specific exceptions. In the last fiscal year, Madam Speaker, the government of Alberta spent approximately \$6 million on responses to over 4,200 access requests made under the FOIP Act. So that's \$6 million that could have been used for a lot of other things. I think, for example, that maybe seniors' support in this case would have been probably a much better place for the \$6 million rather than wasting it on higher administrative costs for all the people that may have had to have been hired to deal with this. So I think that would have been a much better use of the \$6 million.

The member alleges that filling out FOIP requests is part of doing their work as an elected official, a Member of the Legislative Assembly. During the introduction of Bill 204 he said, "I was amazed to discover after being first elected that the costs and waiting times for reimbursement for doing our work were actually slowing us down." Interesting. Madam Speaker, as elected officials it's not our primary purpose to fill out information requests or dig up sensitive information for purely partisan purposes. Time spent completing these requests will surely detract from why we're all here, which is to serve Albertans and advocate on their behalf, not just for political motivations.

Madam Speaker, the fourth principle allows individuals the right of access to information about themselves which is held by a public body. If an MLA wishes to exercise this principle in order to find information about himself or herself using taxpayer funds via free information requests – and, again, they're not free – as proposed by Bill 204, this actually could even be construed as being unethical.

The fifth and final principle upon which the FOIP Act is based is to provide for independent review of decisions made by a public body under this legislation. Madam Speaker, Bill 204 would provide Members of the Legislative Assembly with four free – I hate using this word – freedom of information requests per year. They're not free. The \$6 million is a direct cost to taxpayers. Six million dollars. Although this member alleges that many of their FOIPs are completed on behalf of Albertans, nonprofits, and organizations, FOIPs are used by their party for ideological purposes. These members have every opportunity to gather information on behalf of these organizations they claim to be advocating for by meeting with government officials to attain it.

Madam Speaker, I think this highlights the opposition's extreme lack of intergovernmental diplomacy. I would like to highlight how this amendment of the FOIP Act could only stand to benefit one small group of elected officials. I would argue that it is part of our job as legislators, elected officials, and advocates for our communities to bridge working relationships with our stakeholders and other public bodies and not FOIP them unnecessarily. Let us not forget that we are elected to serve

Albertans, to engage in policy discussions that benefit all Albertans. This constant dredging of information for partisan purposes simply undermines the very integrity and principles of the FOIP process. It's not what it was set up for. As an elected official in this province I find it embarrassing that the opposition resorts to submitting frivolous FOIP requests, and that's become their primary legislative tool. We need to get back to business.

I also find it appalling that this party would seek to legislate special treatment for members of the Assembly. Why doesn't everybody get them for free? It's just a few million dollars. After all, if Bill 204 is calling for MLAs to receive free – and it's not free; \$6 million to the taxpayer – information requests while the public would still be subject to assessment or being assessed full fees doesn't sound fair to me, Madam Speaker, coming from an opposition that preaches fairness on a day-to-day basis. I think it's rather contradictory.

This bill's interests are in direct conflict with the fundamental purpose and intention of the FOIP Act's basic principles. This government is committed to building a stronger Alberta for today and in the future, one that fosters an environment of openness, accountability, and transparency. Madam Speaker, let's just get back to the FOIP Act being what it was originally intended to be.

I will not be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this, seeing that there's been some comment regarding my constituency by previous members. I have a prepared statement, and I'll read it and ad lib as I'm able to.

I want to start with comments about former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who I believe was the worst Prime Minister in Alberta's history. The one thing he did good, though, was to bring in access to information, even though he was too chicken to apply it to his own badly run, deficit-laden government.

Speaking of badly run, deficit-laden governments, this PC government just recently was found to interfere in the freedom of information process by being part of a process months before freedom of information documents were released. There is no reason the politician should know about the files until they are about to go out. Adequately preparing for documents about to go out is acceptable. What isn't acceptable is being part of a document process and knowing months before the file becomes public just what leads to interference, which leads me to my colleague's private member's Bill 204.

What former Liberal staffers like our Justice minister do not understand is that when opposition members ask for information, they're not doing it frivolously, nor are they trying to waste money, as they would suggest we and the general public are doing to hold governments like that tired, inept government to account. When we ask for public records, as is our right, and the PC government ministers turn around and apply fees larger than our entire opposition research budget, we are prevented from doing our job of holding this government to account.

So to fix an undemocratic PC government problem, my colleague brought forward a very reasonable piece of legislation that would allow each MLA in this Legislature to make fee-waived freedom of information requests. To be precise, Madam Speaker, each MLA would have four fee-waived public information requests. These waivers would only take place when the MLA determines the fees are excessive and writes to the Privacy Commissioner to apply for that waiver. As long as the request is not frivolous, vexatious, or without merit, the waiver

would apply. This is simple, reasonable, and, best of all, unlike this government, it is transparent. I fully expect this former Liberal staffer Justice minister and his band of antidemocratic PC ministers, including the minister accountable for accountability, transparency and transformation, to oppose anything that reflects this transparency.

Madam Speaker, you see, 250 years ago Sweden was the first country to adopt freedom of information, the idea being 250 years ago, then and now, that there can be no freedom of the press apart from free access to information, that any governing party such as the one represented by the hon. members opposite that would want to impede or restrict public access to information about government or government performance begs – and I publicly ask you in this Chamber – the question why. This is an issue of freedom of information legislation for our province. Rich in this tradition, this legislation has been brought to our province, to other provinces, to free nations, and to free societies all over the world.

4:10

Why are the members opposite lashing out at the legislative provisions that provide the press and individual Albertans with the very means necessary to ensure accountability? This is more of the PC attitude of entitlement we have all come to know and understand so well, Madam Speaker. What makes these members think that their government should be entitled to operate in secrecy? What scandals or embarrassing revelations are they hiding? Only people who have things to hide are sensitive. That would make these members cling to secrecy while lashing out at those in this Legislature who are calling for measures of accountability and transparency.

All the PCs are talking about right now is cost. The MLA for Banff-Cochrane talked about freebies. He talks about the costs and, therefore, advocates for hiding information. He talks about fishing, but that member just proves that those asking for information are not protected since he knows who made that request. The members for Banff-Cochrane and Lesser Slave Lake need to be completely aware of their parliamentary prerogative in this Chamber. They are protected by parliamentary prerogative in this Chamber, and they are not without, so they would be well advised of the exact wording of the legislation even to those that release the information, as was released in the county of Stettler, which may at one point be deemed to be illegal. These members have ensured that I will be writing to the Privacy Commissioner about their behaviour.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane should be ashamed of himself, and he should be ashamed that he is defending an undemocratic attitude. It is understandable because he is as much of a Liberal as the former Liberal staffer. He talks about witch hunts. This is ridiculous. We believe there is a cost to freedom and there is a need to show the corrupt attitude of members like the one from Banff-Cochrane and even possibly my friend from Lesser Slave Lake, my acquaintance, and the PC cronies.

Therefore, I would urge all members to vote for freedom and direct accountability within this Chamber and within the government of this province of Alberta. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Little Bow.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today as well to speak to Bill 204, brought forward by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The bill is entitled the Freedom of Information and

Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014, and is proposing that all members of the Legislative Assembly receive four free freedom of information and privacy, or FOIP, requests per year. These requests would be overseen by and approved by the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Under section 93(1) of the FOIP Act public bodies can require applicants to pay for specified services, and even though the act's fee provisions prohibit public bodies from charging for all services, they do require applicants to provide a portion of the cost of providing information. However, there are exceptions to this rule.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Section 93(4) of the FOIP Act allows the head of a public body to excuse an applicant from paying all or a portion of the fee if the applicant is unable to pay. FOIP fees are not particularly burdensome and consist of a \$25 dollar initial fee for a one-time request, a \$50 initial fee for continuing requests, and fees in addition to the initial fee where the costs of processing requests for records exceed \$150.

Given the current legislation and fees in place I don't see a need for Bill 204. However, I would like to spend a portion of my time detailing the history of the FOIP Act and how it protects privacy. The FOIP Act was introduced here in the Alberta Legislature in the spring of 1994 after extensive public consultation by an all-party panel. The act, which reflected the recommendations of the all-party panel and the input of Albertans, is seen as the cornerstone of an open, accessible, and accountable government for the people of Alberta. The act was amended in 1999 in response to a review by a select special committee of the Legislative Assembly, and a further review by a select special committee was completed in 2002 – and I was here, Mr. Speaker – which led to the amendment of the act in May of 2003.

In terms of privacy security the FOIP Act guarantees the protection of information privacy such as the right to exercise control over your own personal information by establishing rules for the collection, use, disclosure, and retention of personal information. The act also contains rules regarding the accuracy of personal information and gives individuals the right to request a correction to their personal information in the custody or control of a public body.

In part 1 of the act individuals are provided with a right of access to information, including information about themselves, from public bodies subject to limited and specific exemptions. One example of those exemptions, outlined in section 17, is the criteria to determine when the disclosure of personal information would be an unreasonable invasion of a third party's privacy.

Privacy is protected in the FOIP Act in several ways, including, one, giving individuals a right of access to their own personal information and the opportunity to request corrections to it; two, limiting a public body's use and disclosure of personal information to the purpose for which it was collected, a consistent purpose, another purpose with consent, or a purpose set out in the act; three, requiring public bodies to retain information used to make decisions affecting an individual for at least one year unless the public body and the individual agree otherwise, to allow adequate time for the individual to exercise their right of access or correction if they choose to; four, collecting personal information only as authorized by law; and, five, requiring public bodies to take reasonable security precautions against such risks as unauthorized access, collection, use, disclosure, or destruction.

The protection of privacy is similar in various jurisdictions across Canada as FOIP acts are common in every provincial jurisdiction.

Another similarity between provincial jurisdictions is the fact that none of them allow FOIP fee waivers for provincial politicians. I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker. None of them allow FOIP fee waivers for provincial politicians. In Ontario, for example, section 57(4) states that

A head shall waive the payment of all or any part of an amount required to be paid . . . after considering . . .

(b) whether the payment will cause a financial hardship for the person.

Ontario does not waive fees for its MPPs, or Members of Provincial Parliament, unless the information will benefit public health and safety.

In Prince Edward Island the FOIP Act and its general regulations don't exempt members of their Legislative Assembly from waiving fees. Similar to Alberta and Ontario, the head of a public body in P.E.I. may excuse an applicant from paying part or all of a fee if the applicant cannot afford to pay or if the record relates to the public interest such as the environment or public health.

Again in British Columbia there's no provision that gives MLAs FOIP fee waivers or a given yearly allotment of FOIPs. Section 75(5) of the B.C. FOIP Act allows for fee waivers if the applicant cannot afford payment or if the record relates to matters of public interest.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that no other jurisdiction in Canada allows MLAs any free FOIP requests should help to illustrate to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and his party that this bill is unnecessary. Given the way the Official Opposition has utilized their FOIP requests in the past, allowing them or any MLA four free requests is an avenue that I don't think we should be pursuing. The case, as was mentioned earlier – and again I'll repeat it – involves the county of Stettler receiving a FOIP request from the Wildrose Party because they thought that one of the county's administrative employees was violating the Elections Alberta laws. While the county of Stettler was vindicated by Elections Alberta in 2012, when the organization ruled that it did not violate financial bylaws, the incident illustrates that FOIPs could be used as a tool of some aggressiveness.

All levels of government should be treated as equals and, more importantly, with respect. Where there is a need for information, those involved should work to resolve this issue as diplomatically as possible.

4:20

I would like to thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forward Bill 204, but I cannot in good conscience support this proposal. As I mentioned earlier, no other jurisdiction in the country, whether it's Ontario, B.C., or Prince Edward Island, allows for FOIP fees to be waived for MLAs, and I don't believe Alberta should be the first to take such a plunge. Albertans need to be confident that their elected officials focus on policy issues that matter to them rather than perks such as free FOIP requests.

Every Albertan is expected to follow the necessary steps when requesting a FOIP, and that means paying the fee regardless of who you are. Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't like their politicians to be entitled, and Bill 204 is part of this entitlement. Albertans also expect their elected officials from the municipal and provincial levels of government to work together in a nonconfrontational manner.

I hope all members of this Assembly will rise today and join me in voting against Bill 204. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Little Bow, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very interesting conversation this afternoon. I'm rising to support Bill 204, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014. I just want to go over some of the numbers that we went over today, that I've heard from some of the colleagues on the government side.

I get that talking points can always be great, and we're pretty creative with numbers as we need to be, but at \$8,000, which I believe the Member for Banff-Cochrane said, for each one as an average cost to do a FOIP, if that's correct – could I get a nod? Could be. Anyhow, if you get four of them, that would be \$32,000 per MLA. So if we all take our calculators and multiply that out, 87 times \$32,000 is \$2,784,000. But I believe the Associate Minister of Seniors, from Strathcona-Sherwood Park, says that all his members have to do is to ask the minister.

If you do that, then we could take some simple math off the big numbers. So we take the big number, which is \$2.7 million, and take off all the members from the government side, that wouldn't have to ask for FOIPs. That takes you back to 17 in the Official Opposition, five in the Liberals, four in the NDP, and there are three there – where did they come from? Oh, yeah, from your side; they jumped ship. So there are three there. That works out to \$800,000. So you can take the \$2.7 million that we're using as a talking number, and you knock off of that one the \$800,000. That's kind of what it's going to cost if you actually use the numbers.

I have a hard time believing it costs \$8,000 to do a FOIP. I'm not a bookkeeper by any stretch of the imagination, and judging by the polls, neither are you guys.

I get the whole concept of how it goes, of how everybody is a little concerned about what comes up in the information and everything else, but I think that if we actually look at the bill, you can see that there are many nonprofits and citizens that can't afford the FOIP requests. Yet we're all taxpayers. We should be able to look into the information and find out: is it true, or is it not true?

Those are the challenges, I guess, that I have as an MLA. When you're asked to do something and you want to look into it and you want to get the facts, you should be able to ask through the freedom of information act. The government brought this bill in themselves in 1994, as the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley brought up. It was brought on by this government in the mid-90s because it was something that was needed. So to say that we're going to waive the numbers for four per MLA I don't think is really that far out.

In all honesty, I mean, the number of \$2.7 million that the Member for Banff-Cochrane brought up to use for a total number I think is fairly fictitious. I mean it sells great. Ooh, look at the big number there. But, really, at the end of the day, maximum, if we did use his numbers – and I'm not saying that they are correct or aren't, but I'm saying that they seem a little high – you'd be at \$800,000.

Now, the point is about how the FOIPs have been working. My colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is going to probably bring up some points about kids in care and stuff like that and the ongoing fight that a lot of journalists had with the government to try to get the FOIP information. The point is that if we're not hiding anything, it shouldn't be that big of a deal to let the information out. I mean, it's a pretty simple process, I think. I don't see where the big backlash is against not-for-profits, stuff

like that. MLAs should be trusted to work on behalf of their constituents, which I think all 87 of us in here do. I don't think there's a person in here that comes to work and doesn't plan to work for their constituents. I think we all come here with plans to do that. I think we should be able to get the information we need.

In all honesty, we talk about saving money, and I love the talking points of what it could buy: a helipad here, a dialysis machine there.

Mr. Rodney: You guys do that all the time.

Mr. Donovan: Hey, I agree, and I'm glad you're using our talking points now. It's great to have the Associate Minister of Wellness, from Calgary-Lougheed, start using our talking points. It's just nice to see that everybody is starting to listen in here a little bit.

The point is, though, that if we want to talk about saving money, I mean, it's pretty fictitious to say that we're going to save, you know, from \$2.7 million to \$800,000 and that that's going to be the tipping point that saves this province. Woo-hoo. You guys are lost on this one. I hate to tell you that the tipping point is when all the constituents, all the ratepayers in this province have sat there and seen the millions of dollars that have been blown into the wind. This is how you're going to save the government? Great job, you guys. I love it.

I guess the point that baffles me in the whole thing is that through FOIP probably a lot of the things that have cost – and not that I believe all of the polls, but so far it's cost one Premier their job in here. FOIP has put the information out there so that the public can see what actually goes on in here and where the money is being spent. We talk about saving money. The ministers – put up your hand if you're not a minister – are 50 per cent. I mean, really. To the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill: I don't even know why they haven't put you in as a minister. You have so much to offer to them.

The point is that you have so many ministerial spots, and those all cost money to run when you're an associate minister or a minister. I found the sheet here from before the last election. We didn't have two rows of ministers coloured in the dark colours here.

You talk to people that used to be ministers or past MLAs. There used to be about three to four employees in a minister's office. Now, I believe – but don't quote me – that if you're an associate minister you only get two. Yes, that is correct for associate wellness and associate seniors, but the big boys and girls in the front row, that have minister jobs, have seven or eight assistants in there and spin doctors to help you guys figure out how some of the numbers work in here some days.

If you want to save some money, maybe tone down the size of the cabinet, and if you were one of the two people that didn't get a cabinet position, reassess what you did wrong. With your colleagues you flip a coin. Heads, you're a minister; tails, you're not. What happened? Why didn't you? Do you want to save some money? Tighten this up a little bit. Sorry. You know, there are some great members that sit on this side. Edmonton-South West, you are probably one of the best MLAs, and you even pondered coming over here full-time and hanging out with the table of three in the back.

If we want to save money, let's do that stuff, but if you really truly think that that's your talking point, how we're saving money on Bill 204, pull your head out, you guys. You're suffocating. I'm just challenging you out here. Let's tighten up where the money is. If you think this is what's going to sink you, the \$800,000, if it possibly costs that – I'm still not quite sure those numbers from Banff-Cochrane are right, but I'm not here to argue the point with

him. It's \$8,000 a cheque, and there are four of them. That's \$32,000. It's you think this is the \$800,000 that's going to save your ship, keep paddling.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just mention to the Member for Little Bow that an average doesn't mean that that's the cost of each and every individual one. If we look at the highest ones – and I'm sure that those would be the ones that would be referenced for the four free FOIPs – I think we could see a substantial difference in the amount.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014, which has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The FOIP process can be a very important tool in ensuring transparency. I think we all agree. I would hope that the hon. member would look at some changes to his bill because without some fences around his request, I fear that the coffee shop talk that I've heard might actually have some legs and could possibly have happened and could possibly continue to take place. That is, I cannot imagine that members would FOIP themselves, let alone be allowed to charge that to taxpayers. I think you've got to have, as I said, some fences around what you're asking for.

4:30

The purpose of Bill 204 is to provide all Members of the Legislative Assembly with four free freedom of information and privacy, or FOIP, requests per year, which would be overseen and approved by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Well, that would probably be, as I mentioned earlier, the FOIPs that are not the least costly but the most costly.

The FOIP Act provides a formal method of requesting information held by public bodies which is not available by other means. It cannot be used to replace research that is readily available, that just takes a little footwork and elbow grease to find out, another fence that needs to be built. The term "public body" refers to bodies such as the government of Alberta, school jurisdictions, municipalities, public libraries, Métis settlements, police services, and various others.

Alberta's FOIP Act, as said earlier, was introduced in the Alberta Legislature in the spring of 1994 following an extensive public consultation process by an all-party panel. The act, which reflected the recommendations of that all-party panel and the input of Albertans, is seen as the cornerstone of an open and accessible and accountable government for the people of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the FOIP process currently in place is more than sufficient, fair, and appropriate, addressing the needs of all Albertans.

Frankly, if the members opposite don't think that their budget is large enough to accommodate what it is that they're working on, there is a process that we follow here, and that is to go through Members' Services with a budget request. That, to me, is fair for everyone.

Today, though, I will speak to the details of administering a FOIP, outlining how much time and effort are utilized throughout this particular process. Firstly, the FOIP Act provides individuals with the right to request access to information in the custody or control of public bodies while providing those public bodies with a framework by which they must conduct the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information. Administering FOIPs is no

small task, nor is it an inexpensive one for the parties involved in gathering the needed and relevant information sources.

The process begins by submitting a FOIP request, that is received by the FOIP office, thereby giving the government 30 days to respond. In addition to providing access to records and information in response to FOIP requests, public bodies must provide access to information and records through two other processes, routine disclosure in response to inquiries and requests for information and active dissemination of information.

There are members in this Assembly that have been involved in municipal government. You know, we've heard today that there are municipalities that have been FOIPed. I think that when you've sat in municipal government and you've seen how hard some of those small administrative groups have to work to collect this information, it is no small task.

Mr. Speaker, routine disclosure and active dissemination of information will likely satisfy many of the information needs of the members of the public and is highly encouraged so that various FOIP requests can be avoided. Public bodies should bear in mind that the FOIP process is in addition to and does not replace existing procedures for access to information where that disclosure would not otherwise be prohibited by the FOIP Act. There are numerous advantages to using routine disclosure and active dissemination processes, one being that the public will be better served and more informed through the planned and targeted release of information. Making information available regarding routine inquiries and requests by the active dissemination of information can promote cost-effective management of public information resources.

All of this being said, the first step in processing a FOIP request is ensuring that all other available information channels and resources have been properly utilized before further action is taken to access information that may not be readily available to the requestee. Looking back at old records that are available should be the first step. This is very important, Mr. Speaker.

For intergovernmental diplomacy and ensuring that unnecessary costs are not incurred, further requests must be in writing and provide enough detail to enable the public body to identify the record. The applicant will usually use the official request form, that is readily available online, and will pay \$25 for a one-time request or \$50 for a continuing request. The request process is also tailored to fit the needs of people with disabilities or those who cannot speak fluent English. These individuals may submit oral requests, where the public body would then put the oral request into written form and provide the applicant with a copy.

It is stated within the FOIP guidelines and practices manual that public bodies should to the best of their ability assist these individuals seeking records to exercise their rights under regular procedures. The head of a public body must make every reasonable effort to assist applicants and to respond to each applicant openly, accurately, and completely. This is their duty, and it is our duty to ensure it is enforced. After the initial request is made, it will be determined whether the request is for access to general records or for the applicant's own personal information as well as whether or not the request is a continuing request. The request will be clarified with the applicant. A decision will be made regarding the transfer of the request, and acknowledgement will be sent to the applicant.

Clarifying the request may include assisting the applicant in defining the subject of the request, the specific kinds of records of interest, and the time period for which the records are being requested.

Transferring a request may also be possible if the applicant makes a request that would be more appropriately handled by

another public body. This, Mr. Speaker, is determined by the FOIP office. It is expected that all public bodies will perform an adequate search for records, meaning that the search is timely and that every reasonable effort is administered.

Continuing requests refer to requests that are in effect and continue for a specified period of time of up to two years. This permits the applicants to continue to receive records concerning a particular subject or issue at regular intervals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. It seems we have run out of time for debate on this item.

With that, under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i) I would offer the sponsor of the motion, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, to close debate on Bill 204.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To all the MLAs and the ministers in the House today: I greatly appreciate your time and your input spent discussing my bill and my idea. I do want to talk, though, about a few of the misconceptions and a few of the fears and try to go in some direction to clear those up.

First of all, it was said a lot: members opposite. The bill wasn't intended just for the opposition. The bill wasn't intended just for the Wildrose. The bill was intended for all MLAs. The wish is that for not-for-profit societies, for the 4 million Albertans, that any one of them that from time to time is in a situation where they can't afford to be involved in the FOIP process or don't know the ins and outs could go to their MLA or any of the 87 MLAs and put forward their idea, put forward their need. The wish and the hope is about how much more involved this would make Albertans in our government, in our process, how much more information this would give us all to be involved and do the right thing. I believe and am told continually by Albertans and am told continually by people in Cypress-Medicine Hat that they want and will start to demand a greater part of our democratic process.

It was mentioned that, oh, there was no clarification on unused FOIPs or transferred FOIPs. Could they be transferred? Please don't read anything into that. Four free FOIPs per MLA per year. Use them or don't use them. You can't transfer them. You can't sell them. Bitcoin maybe.

The whole idea was to have Albertans, not-for-profits and people in need of help from the government, come to any one of the 87 of us, express their need, and express their concern. Hopefully, usually it would start with your local MLA, but this would give the opportunity for more information to come forward, for more Albertans to be involved. I mean, in a short, little bill you've got to put things in there, but you can't put everything in there. But if you believe that accountability makes people perform better and if you believe that accountability makes government better, I would ask you to support my bill.

4:40

MLAs are in a unique position. That's the next misconception I want to clear up. We are the number one gatekeeper. We are the number one protector of \$44 billion a year, of 4 million Albertan taxpayers' money. We are expected to get value for this money as much as we can.

My bill had some ways that would go forward to make that happen. When an MLA asked for a free FOIP, the name would be

published, and we would publish the respective public body. It would be open and transparent. It wouldn't be hidden.

Again, with the opportunity for any one of 4 million Albertans to come forward, for any one of the 40,000 to 50,000 people we each represent to come forward to do this, this is not a freebie for MLAs. This is an opportunity. This is an opportunity for Albertans to be engaged further in the political process. Of course, every four years we are a hundred per cent accountable to all of our constituents, to all Albertans. If an MLA abused this privilege, if an MLA abused this ability to help Albertans, obviously his opponent in the election could bring this forward and use this against him.

I kept hearing the word "frivolous," that MLAs could frivolously do this, that we could check ourselves, that we could waste money. To be clear, part of my bill is that the Privacy Commissioner decides if the waiver is to be approved. With the system that's there now, he's the one that decides if it is to be approved.

One of the other things we talked a lot about was the cost. When I talk to Albertans, more than the costs I hear about the time delays, the year and a half it takes to get things, the two years it takes to get things, the uncertainty of knowing if you're going to be able to prove that your request was in the public interest. Part of my bill would expedite this, would make it so that we could get Albertans the information they deserve. And they do deserve it. It's their taxpayer money. Let's not forget that.

I also heard that this is bad politics.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The time has elapsed for your concluding speech.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Donovan	Rowe
Barnes	Eggen	Swann
Bikman	Kang	Towle
Brown	Pedersen	

Against the motion:

Allen	Griffiths	Olesen
Amery	Horne	Olson
Bhullar	Hughes	Quadri
Calahasen	Jablonski	Quest
Campbell	Jansen	Redford
Casey	Jeneroux	Rodney
Cusanelli	Johnson, L.	Sandhu
Dallas	Khan	Sarich
Dorward	Kubinec	Scott
Drysdale	Lemke	Starke
Fawcett	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Fenske	Luan	Weadick
Fraser	McDonald	Woo-Paw
Fritz	McIver	Xiao
Goudreau	McQueen	Young

Totals: For – 11 Against – 45

[Motion for second reading of Bill 204 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Being that there are only about three minutes to go, I would suggest that we call it 5 o'clock and go on to motions.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Fort.

Public Reporting of Privacy Breaches

505. Dr. Brown moved on behalf of Mr. Cao:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Health Information Act and other acts governing freedom of information and protection of privacy that would allow the Information and Privacy Commissioner to release information to relevant ministers' offices and affected parties when a data breach occurs.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise today and to open the debate on Motion 505. I'm speaking to the motion on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, who believes that legislation pertaining to freedom of information and protection of privacy should be amended to ensure that the Information and Privacy Commissioner is able to take the appropriate steps whenever a privacy breach is disclosed.

As hon. members will realize, this motion is in response to an incident that occurred last September but wasn't made public until January of this year. Of course, I'm referring to the Medicentres family health care clinic data breach. On January 22, 2014, Medicentres family health care clinics publicly admitted that one of their laptop computers, containing the personal health information of 620,000 Albertans, had been stolen from an information technology consultant on September 26, 2013.

This information breach could potentially have impacted any individual who had visited a Medicentres clinic within the past two and a half years. To date this privacy breach is considered to be the largest in Alberta's history. Under the Personal Information Protection Act private companies must report to the commissioner any information breach that poses a significant harm to any individual, or the commissioner can compel a company to notify affected individuals.

However, health custodians such as Medicentres clinics are regulated by the Health Information Act, and the Health Information Act, which was passed by the Alberta Legislature in 1999 and came into effect on April 25, 2001, would govern. It provides individuals with the right to request access to health records in the possession of custodians while providing custodians a framework within which they much conduct the collection, use, and disclosure of health information. In the case of the Medicentres data breach, the organization voluntarily informed the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office about the breach and asked for recommendations on how to handle the situation, but it was never required to put any recommendations into practice as the Health Information Act does not force the offending organization to disclose information/privacy breaches.

5:00

Another issue with the Medicentres data breach was the fact that the Information and Privacy Commissioner was in possession of this information as of October 22, 2013, but was unable to

inform the public. Her hands were tied. The commissioner stated that the Health Information Act prohibited her from informing the appropriate parties of the breach, including of even the most general information. Specifically, section 91(1) of the Health Information Act states:

The Commissioner and anyone acting for or under the direction of the Commissioner must not disclose any information obtained in performing their duties, powers and functions under this Act, except as provided in subsections (2) to (5) and section 50.1.

After Medicentres clinics publicly admitted the breach, the Minister of Health called on the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office to launch an investigation. Shortly after the Minister of Health made the request, the Information and Privacy Commissioner announced the commencement of a two-part investigation. The first part would examine the circumstances of the lost or stolen data, and the second part would focus on a broader review of how privacy violations in the health sector are reported. In relation to the second part of the investigation it should be noted that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has been advocating for changes to the Health Information Act similar to the rules that are currently laid out in the Personal Information Protection Act, that would provide the office with the power to force health information custodians to report information breaches to their patients if there is a risk of harm from identity theft.

Mr. Speaker, it's incumbent upon this House to discuss sensible solutions to the largest data breach in Alberta history. We owe it to Albertans to ensure that the Information and Privacy Commissioner is able to swiftly notify affected individuals of data breaches, especially when it concerns health custodians who fall under the Health Information Act. We need to continue to find avenues to strengthen an already strong, independent officer of the Legislature. I believe that Motion 505 is one of those avenues.

To reiterate, the purpose of the motion is to ensure that various pieces of legislation pertaining to freedom of information and protection of privacy are amended to guarantee that the Information and Privacy Commissioner is notified of a privacy breach and that the commissioner is able to release that information to the relevant ministers' offices as well as the parties affected by the breach so that appropriate steps can be taken to protect them from harm.

I would urge all hon. members to support my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort's Motion 505. I look forward to further debate on the topic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 505 and to also express my support of this motion. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 505. It is a timely motion, considering recent privacy breaches that have occurred, that could be helpful in prompting legislation to amend the Health Information Act and correct potentially damaging breaches of privacy. I urge all members of the Assembly to support this common-sense motion.

An Hon. Member: Pardon?

Mrs. Towle: Motion 505 would "urge the Government to [amend] . . . the Health Information Act and other Acts governing freedom of information and protection of privacy" to allow the Privacy Commissioner "to release information to relevant

Ministers' Offices and affected parties when a data breach occurs."

It's interesting that across the aisle they sound surprised that we would support this motion when in reality our party has supported many motions brought forward by private members of the opposite side, not to mention many government motions, many government amendments, and many government bills.

This motion in particular, Motion 505, is a common-sense motion that, if implemented in forthcoming legislation, would help to ease the hardships caused when a privacy breach occurs. We've seen how amendments to the Health Information Act are necessary. Recently, as the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill had mentioned, a stolen laptop containing the files of 620,000 Albertans alerted us to this very fact. Due to the Health Information Act the Privacy Commissioner could not inform the government or the affected parties. That meant precious time was lost when Albertans could have been taking proactive measures to protect themselves. I believe at the time even the Minister of Health expressed concern over that delay.

Let's think about this for a moment. A stolen laptop victimized 620,000 Albertans and made them vulnerable, and legislation prevented the company from informing the victims. Something is clearly wrong with that picture. The victims and the Privacy Commissioner should be the first to be informed immediately after a breach has occurred. I'm happy to support such a motion like this, that would create an avenue to do just that. In the event of a privacy breach time is vital. It allows people to ensure that they are protected to the fullest extent possible. When Albertans are denied the knowledge that a breach has occurred, the potential damage and victimization intensifies.

The recent Medicentres breach isn't the only privacy breach that has occurred. A CBC investigation found several cases of privacy breaches of home-care clients last summer. In one case files were put on the roof of a car before a client manager drove off. Luckily, the confidential documents were returned by a good Samaritan. In another case a courier delivered confidential care plans to four home-care clients and left the unsealed packages in mailboxes. These kinds of breaches are more and more common than the massive Medicentres breach, but they are no less significant. Any breach of privacy information can be potentially damaging to whom it has occurred, yet under the Health Information Act none of these would have required the custodian of health information to report the breach to the commissioner or to those who have had their privacy breached.

Let's tackle this problem first by passing Motion 505 today, and then let's amend the legislation. It's time to take action to protect Albertans. They should be in the first thought for every action we do, especially in the event of privacy breaches. Albertans and the Privacy Commissioner need to be informed as the first order of business should a breach occur.

I look forward to listening to the comments from other members on this matter, and I urge all members in this House to support Motion 505. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me also to rise and speak in support of Motion 505, the amendment of the Health Information Act for release of data-breach information. I'm sure – it has been well discussed, and certainly it's been in the public domain for a number of months – that this inappropriate failure to require the Information Commissioner to report breaches

of security in the health system has been recognized. A fairly minor change, really, in the act is all that's needed to ensure that not only the individuals whose privacy has been breached but the minister himself get timely access and can start to redress any problems that might be associated with it. It's clearly the responsibility of the minister to be in possession of information such as this, that would compromise individual records, physicians, other health workers, and, potentially, testing results as well as treatment programs.

I don't think anybody who is thoughtful about the health care system and the importance of privacy would have any reservations about seeing this important knowledge come to the attention of the minister and be acted upon in a timely way, so there's no question that we also support this and look forward to its speedy passage in this House.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Motion 505, brought forth by my colleague from Calgary-Fort, urging that we amend the Health Information Act and other acts governing freedom of information and protection of privacy. As we've heard, the amendment we speak to today "would allow the Information and Privacy Commissioner to release information to relevant Ministers' Offices and affected parties [if] a data breach occurs," allowing for appropriate steps to be taken. The purpose of imposing such urgency on a matter of personal privacy is so that all Albertans are protected as well as able to take proactive action in addressing privacy breach issues.

Alberta Health was made aware of a privacy breach that impacted 620,000 Albertans after a laptop was stolen at the Medicentres family health care clinic last year. This motion strives to ensure that situations like this are dealt with in a timely manner and that appropriate bodies and impacted persons are informed of the breach as soon as possible so that immediate action can take place. For this to happen, the Privacy Commissioner must be given the authority to release information on privacy breaches to relevant ministries, their offices as well as affected parties.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, as it currently stands, the Health Information Act states in section 91(1):

The Commissioner and anyone acting for or under the direction of the Commissioner must not disclose any information obtained in performing their duties, powers and functions under this Act, except as provided in subsections (2) to (5) and section 50.1.

The Health Information Act provides Albertans with the right to request access to health records in custody or under control of custodians while providing custodians with a framework within which they must conduct the collection, use, and disclosure of health information.

Custodians, Mr. Speaker, are defined as follows: the ministers of the departments of Alberta Health and Wellness, a health service provider designated as a custodian under the health information amendment regulation, pharmacies, regional health authorities, provincial health boards, and nursing home operators. In addition to regulating information access, collection, use, and disclosure practices of custodians, the Health Information Act also covers the actions of affiliates. Affiliates include employees, volunteers, contractors, and agencies under contract to the custodian. Ultimately, custodians are responsible for the information collected, used, and disclosed by their affiliates.

The amendment proposed by Motion 505, as it relates to the Health Information Act, would ensure that when custodians inform the Information and Privacy Commissioner of any privacy breach that affects the public interest, that breach is released to the appropriate ministry offices as well as the parties directly affected by the breach. These amendments are critical for the purpose of allowing timely action in privacy breach situations that may occur in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the next topic I would like to discuss in relation to Motion 505 is the Alberta Personal Information Protection Act, or PIPA. The purpose of PIPA is to govern the means by which private-sector organizations handle personal information. Further, PIPA recognizes both the right of an individual to have his or her personal information protected and the need of organizations to collect, use, or disclose personal information for purposes that are reasonable. PIPA provides individuals the opportunity to request access to their own personal information and includes provisions regarding the correction and care of personal information by organizations.

Section 34.1 of PIPA states that private-sector organizations are required to notify the Information and Privacy Commissioner of breaches dealing with "the loss of or unauthorized access to or disclosure of the personal information" under their control. In cases where there is a significant harm to an individual as result of a breach, the Information and Privacy Commissioner may require organizations to notify impacted persons. Motion 505 would therefore align the Health Information Act with the Personal Information Protection Act, allowing the Privacy Commissioner to disclose any information obtained in performing their duties, including breaches of privacy, that should be disclosed to all affected persons so that appropriate action can be taken.

Mr. Speaker, I support Motion 505 as it aims to strengthen our legislation within the Alberta information act and related acts so that all Albertans are better served by it. I also encourage my hon. colleagues to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Motion 505, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. This motion calls on the government to amend the Health Information Act as well as other acts that govern freedom of information and protection of privacy. The proposed amendments would allow the Information and Privacy Commissioner to release information to the appropriate departmental offices and any affected parties whenever a breach of data occurs. These amendments propose to facilitate a faster and more efficient means of appropriate data sharing when a breach of privacy occurs.

Before I proceed any further, I would like to take a brief moment to say that I applaud the hon. member for bringing this matter before the House today. Anything that we can do to protect the privacy and personal information of Albertans deserves our serious consideration, and it is clear that the hon. member is well aware of this. I do think that Motion 505 indicates a step in the right direction in this regard.

Now, as we move forward in discussing the intent of Motion 505, I think it would be helpful to consider briefly some of what has been done in other provinces along these lines. Specifically, I would like to take a look at the personal health information acts in Ontario and British Columbia. Ontario's health act sets out rules for the collection, use, and disclosure of personal health

information. Those rules are applicable to every custodian of health information that operates in the province of Ontario, and that also applies to organizations and individuals that receive personal health information from their custodians.

The rules recognize the unique character of personal health information as being one of the most sensitive types of information to collect and store. To complicate matters, it is also a type of information that is frequently shared. This information is shared for a variety of reasons, Mr. Speaker, including for the purposes of medical care and treatment, health research, and logistics of managing a publicly funded health care system.

Ontario's legislation seeks to balance individuals' rights to privacy with the needs of those who provide health care services. There are certain limited exceptions, but generally speaking, the legislation requires that custodians of health information obtain consent before collecting or making use of personal information. It is important to note that all individuals retain the right to access this information. They may also request that a correction be made to the information. This is how matters currently stand in Ontario.

We can weigh this with what we currently find with our neighbours next door in British Columbia. B.C. also has a personal health information access and protection of privacy act that governs the use and disclosure of information. One important component of B.C.'s legislation specifies that the head of a public body must not establish a category of records that contains personal information unless that information would not constitute, if disclosed, an unreasonable invasion of the personal privacy of the individuals to whom the information pertains. Depending on circumstances, one can see how such measures could be useful in protecting the public interest and the well-being of individuals involved in handling and contributing to sensitive and private information.

The point of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, is to give a glimpse of what has been done. It goes to show that there are a variety of ways in which to protect privacy, and this brings us back to Motion 505, which takes into account what should happen when privacy is unfortunately breached. Obviously, this is an eventuality we work hard to avoid; nonetheless, it pays off to be prepared with measures in place in case the system fails.

Mr. Speaker, I am strongly in favour of maintaining this government's strong accountability measures, and I believe that Motion 505 indicates a further step forward in upholding our great track record. I am pleased to say that I stand in support of Motion 505, and I encourage all hon. members to do the same. I also want to reiterate my gratitude to the Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this matter before the House today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to the motion?

Seeing none, I'll invite the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Fort to close debate.

Dr. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Fort I do appreciate the support of the members who have spoken on Motion 505, and I'd encourage all members of the House to support the motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried unanimously]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, did I catch your eye?

Mr. Olson: You're very good, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I move that we adjourn now until 1:30 tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker: Until 7:30 p.m., I believe I heard you say, hon. Deputy Government House Leader. Thank you.

Mr. Olson: Until 7:30 tonight. I missed that. I'm not on duty tonight.

The Deputy Speaker: Just to clarify, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that the House stand adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, May 5, 2014

Issue 25e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 5, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Notley moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time but that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

[Adjourned debate April 23: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my colleagues. You know, there's been a good deal of discussion around referrals, et cetera, on this bill. There's also been a good deal of discussion that I've had with members on both sides of the table in terms of the pension boards. I think that when we are done with this referral – and I would urge members both opposite and on our side to actually vote this referral down in second reading and that we would move the bill through second reading so that we can deal with possibly other referral motions that may be coming forward after second reading – it's important that hon. members understand that there is an intention to work towards there, the concept that we have in terms of Bill 9.

I think that I ended my speech on this referral motion last by saying that we're doing the right thing. I still very firmly believe that, Mr. Speaker. I still very firmly believe that there is an agenda that we have set for public-sector pension sustainability, and I look forward to us working towards that throughout the summer and into the fall.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a pleasant change of heart. The tone has shifted somewhat from the last time that we were here talking about Bill 9, hasn't it?

An Hon. Member: Spring has sprung.

Mr. Wilson: Oh, it's spring. Is that what it is? Yes. It must be that fresh air, the beautiful weather that we've been having in Alberta that's changed the hearts and minds of those on the other side, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's funny. I originally made these speaking notes at the time that this amendment was tabled, and my intent at that point in time was to support it. I appreciate the Minister of Finance suggesting that we will be moving this in Committee of the Whole. I believe that that is a positive step. Better late than never. It does allow the committees to do the work that they were originally intended for: to analyze a bill, to bring the public in, to have all parties engage in the debate around something so important as a bill like this, that has an impact on roughly 300,000 Albertans. It's incredibly important to them and should be to all Albertans. At the end of the day public-sector unions, public-

sector employees, front-line workers across this province impact every single one of us with the work that they do, and we need to be mindful of that.

Now, I know that there have been a number of well-organized groups such as the AUMA and AAMD and C who have come out against this, and I hope that they are invited to partake in that committee process later on when it does happen – I'm assuming over this summer – and then this bill can come back, ideally in the fall, and we can have another fulsome debate here in this House as to what the committee finds.

You know, another positive to having this go to committee is that I believe it allows the . . .

Mr. Donovan: Relevance?

Mr. Wilson: It's going to be one of those nights, Mr. Speaker.

It allows the leadership that is impending in this province to play out and to have whomever becomes the next Premier of this province to also put their stamp on this as opposed to having it be something that they will be dealing with over the summer and possibly distracting from the important job of finding a new leader for this Progressive Conservative Party.

I also made notes a couple of weeks ago that the former associate minister suggested that consultations were done, and he did that in a very passionate way, which, as I have alluded to before in this House, is often the way in which he speaks. Unfortunately, it seems as though they weren't done well enough because Mayor Nenshi has suggested that he believes that the Ministry of Finance perhaps even misled the city of Calgary as to the intent of Bill 9.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, I will succumb to the Minister of Finance's suggestion that we do not support this specific amendment, and I will trust that there will be an amendment forthcoming in Committee of the Whole to send that to the appropriate committee to be studied further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first day back, and I didn't know what I was doing, but I think I know maybe a little bit now about what I'm going to do. On Bill 9 I had lots of feedback, lots of e-mails, and I was going to, you know, read them all out and bring all the points. There's lots of opposition on Bill 9, and I'm glad that an agreement has been reached to send it down to the policy field committee for further study. We look forward to having all the consultation processes done properly so all the stakeholders have their say in it. This will save the government the humiliation of going back to the courts and all that. So we will do it right – probably this will be the first time we do it right – and I hope in the fall session we will be able to deal with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, we'll call the question on the amendment. For the record RA1, I believe, is the amendment we're dealing with. I'll call the question on the vote on amendment RA1.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 9 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: So we're now back to debate on second reading of the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Okay. I move the following amendment under the name of my colleague, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Dr. Swann, to move that the motion . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just the name of the riding, please.

Mr. Kang: Sorry. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: This is a hoist amendment?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, it is.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. We need to have the amendment to the table. I guess once I've got a signal from the table that this amendment is in order, then we'll resume debate.

Hon. members, we have before us amendment H1, and we will begin debate on amendment H1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

7:40

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in second reading to the amendment for a hoist that has been proposed by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View and brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-McCall. This has been a really interesting process, not the least because it's involved so many people in Alberta. I think we've all had a good amount of feedback from individuals that are in line to receive a pension, those that are receiving a pension, those that don't receive a pension, and employers.

I'm glad that the government has been calm enough to allow enough time for that feedback to start to flow. Sometimes there's a haste that makes some waste in the House here, and things are pushed through too fast, and people don't get an opportunity to understand what's going on and to be able to comment on it. This recent amendment is asking for a hoist, which sends it into the parliamentary netherworld for a period of six months. The assumption is that six months from now we're not sitting, so it sort of disappears forever. In fact, I think we will be sitting, and it would be able to be brought back that way.

We've heard from the Provincial Treasurer just a few moments ago, who indicated that, in fact, he would be willing to entertain sending Bill 9 to a policy field committee for further examination, which would allow for a public hearing process, my particular concern. I thank the Provincial Treasurer for that, and I thank the Government House Leader for carrying the message forward. This is of such importance to people.

I think one of the things that I have heard most often is: we are trying to plan. Having a bill in front of us that changes things while the game is on – and I don't mean to trivialize what I'm talking about here, but everybody understands that you don't change the rules of the game once you're playing the game. That's what's happened here. It talks about changing COLA allowances, that they wouldn't be a set amount, that it would be some targeted amount, which may or may not be applied depending on how

much money was in the kitty. For people that are trying to plan ahead and figure out whether they can or should retire now, how much money they will need, do they need to go and take another job, do they need to work way past 65, do they need their spouse to work: it's hard to plan when that kind of uncertainty is now being put in front of you by the government about your public-sector pension plan, and in Bill 9 we are talking about public-sector pension plans.

We talked a little bit about poverty and poverty for people who are retired, poverty for seniors. One of my real concerns is that a very, very high percentage, a disproportionate percentage of people in poverty – and in this case I'll talk about seniors in poverty – are women. Eighty per cent of seniors living in poverty are women, and that to me is a really critical statistic. We already have an uneven track for women who are in the workforce. Taking time off to have children or raise children counts against them when you talk about pension earnings or pensionable earnings. They are more likely to be working in areas that are paying a wage, not a salary. They are more likely to be, as I said, with big gaps in their working career, so their Canada pension plan contributions would be less and earnings into a pension plan, a public-sector pension plan, would also be less.

So what did I see could be the outcome of a Bill 9? What I saw was more women in poverty. At one point we were talking about how the average pension was \$12,000, and this was met with great hoots of derision from my hon. colleagues opposite. I thought, well, you know, maybe I'm wrong. That happens occasionally, not often but occasionally. So I went out and started to look around and ask around, read the tables. Yeah, in fact, a lot of people get about \$12,000 as a pension, which isn't a lot of money. You know, it's a thousand bucks a month. Yes, at that low an income they're probably in for subsidized housing and maybe some other benefit programs, but is that really what we wanted to see for seniors in this province, for our public-sector workers, wanted to see them moving into retirement, their senior years, you know, looking forward to the food bank? I just don't think that's what anybody in this Legislative Assembly wanted to see.

I'm very glad that we're going to have an opportunity to send this to a policy field committee, and I really hope that the policy field committee takes it all seriously and spends the amount of time with it that needs to be taken so that all of the issues are understood. We've had a battle of statistics: your statistics versus my statistics. Mine say that we're not in such bad shape. Any deficit in the pension funds would be addressed within somewhere between nine and 12 years. That doesn't seem so bad. Other statistics that the government had said that we were in serious trouble and death defying and the sky is falling and all that kind of thing. So, you know, what are the real numbers? I'd like to know that and be able to dig a bit more with it.

The last point I want to raise here is that we are such an amazing province. We are such a wonderful place. We have so much opportunity here. It absolutely drives me wild when we are planning for things to get worse, and that's what Bill 9 does. We're planning for things to get worse, and we shouldn't be doing that in this province. We should be planning for things to get better, not to get worse.

When I look at the people that work in the public sector – and that's a very wide range of people, good people who come into public service to do that, to serve. You know, they want a reasonable wage, and with that came a reasonable pension. That was the deal. They got paid less all the way through their careers, but there was a pension and, as we know, not a grandiose pension.

Okay. We're considering taking that deal apart in Bill 9, and I think we have to be very cautious about that. But attached to that

is: how do we then attract and retain the bright young people that we need to help us develop the public service of tomorrow? How do we attract and keep some of the very intelligent young people that work for us as pages? How do we keep them in the public sector? There are a number of other people, that I'm going to call under 40, that are now working around us at the Legislative Assembly and that we're very fortunate to have working for us. How do we keep them? How do we say to them, "This is a great job, it's worth while staying here to do the kind of work you do, and, look, you're going to come out of this at least not behind as compared to what would happen if you went into the private sector?"

I'm very concerned. Aside from all of the other issues of people that are in that pension track today or that are already retired, I'm looking forward into the future and going: what's the deal we're going to have with the civil servants of tomorrow to be able to retain them in public service jobs if we're saying, "Well, the pension is a little iffy, and we don't pay you, you know, all that great in the public service compared to the private sector, so come on down and work for us?" When there is such a world of opportunity open in front of them, that's not much of an incentive to come and work for us in the public service.

7:50

These are the people that back us up. They make us look good every day. They work in the departments. They work in other public-sector areas like, you know, in the parks, in SRD, in ambulance services, firefighters, police officers, teachers, nurses, people in the medical professions that are helping us. It's a lot of people that are working that make us look good and make our society move forward.

I think it's really important, and I'm very glad that the House leaders have been able to negotiate and that it's been met with some favourable response. You know, as much as we like to get in here and roll our sleeves up and fight, or at least I do, and how loath I would be to give up that opportunity to spend a couple of all-nighters in here with all of you because I know that there are some rookies that haven't done that yet and would be so excited to do it with me, as much as fun as all that is, if we can achieve those things and be able to take a step back, look at both Bill 9 and Bill 10 with a much more critical eye and have the involvement of the people who are affected by these changes – I hope you are going to be coming out to talk to us about what you think. I'm sorry; I'm pointing at some of the people in the gallery that I would say are under 40 that are going to come and tell us in the public hearings how they think the changes anticipated in Bill 9 and Bill 10 would affect their interest in staying in the public service. I'm willing to give up my all-nighters. You know, as disappointed as I am, I'm willing to give that up if we can achieve that more reasoned, tempered look at it, particularly allowing the people that are actually affected by the pensions to speak.

I know that – and I'm going to use the wrong word here: the board of directors, the people that are in charge of the plans and are political appointees.

An Hon. Member: The boards.

Ms Blakeman: The boards. Okay.

I know they were asked what they thought about Bill 9, but that's not the same as asking the people that are directly affected by Bill 9, and I think it's really important to do that when you are talking about their financial future. In this day and age I think the concept of the Freedom 55 commercials – anybody remember those? – is a bit of a laugh. I don't know many people, particularly

in the public sector, that can afford to do that. I am much encouraged to believe that the government is going to be open to receiving information and new information and may be willing to change what they have and are bringing forward in Bill 9 and Bill 10.

You know, Bill 10 has sort of been the country cousin to Bill 9 here. I don't think that should be overlooked, and I certainly think that there's a great possibility that once pensions plans were affected by what was in Bill 9, they then would have been considered eligible under a number of the requirements under Bill 10 and would have been treated the same way. There a pension could be changed retroactively, which is tough. I know. I saw a few eyebrows going up here, going: "Really? Huh?" Yeah. So it's important that we look at both of those, not necessarily together but that we do have a look at both of them.

As I said, I'm really glad that I got a chance to speak. When I spoke before, I referenced the number of employees that work for our municipal governments and how much our cities would be affected, particularly our large cities, if a number of people decided: "Hey. Not much worth it. I don't gain anything by working any longer for the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Peace River, et cetera." I'm on my way and watching an exodus of 2,000 or 3,000 or more civic workers leaving those big centres, and these are the people that know how to do stuff. They know how it all works. They know that little trick. I'm going to use an engine analogy. You know, sometimes you go to start a two-cycle motor and it's just not happening for you, but you know that if you kind of work with the choke a little bit, it'll work for you. That's what we need.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I was going to ask the hon. member to elaborate on her experiences with cutting the lawn with two-stroke lawn mowers, but I didn't.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to come and speak to this amendment to Bill 9. The motion, of course, is a hoist: that the bill "be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time . . . six months hence." It would have the effect, I think, of killing the legislation. That is certainly the desired effect from my point of view.

Today in question period the hon. Premier challenged me to say whether I wanted to kill the bill or refer it to committee. My answer was that I would prefer to kill the bill but that failing that, I thought that we should give Albertans a chance to have input into the bill and that, hopefully, the government would withdraw the bill at some point. That's still my view, Mr. Speaker, so that's why I'm going to be voting in favour of this. I've set out clearly my reasons for opposing Bill 9, and I think that a few major points bear repeating.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, there was not adequate consultation, especially with the people who are enrolled in the pension, who will receive it or who are receiving it now. That's a critical point.

If, in fact, there were some issues with respect to these pension plans, then I think we need to recognize that not only the government has an interest in making sure that the plans are solid and viable and will provide a good retirement income. Other employers such as the city of Calgary, for example, have that interest as well, as do the employees who are enrolled in the plan,

the people receiving the pensions, the pension boards themselves, and the unions that represent the employees and negotiate on their behalf. All have an interest in making sure that these plans are viable and solid going forward, and therefore there's a good basis for negotiation, Mr. Speaker.

That's what I think needs to happen. I think that the government should not legislate until it has negotiated, and that hasn't happened. So I'm going to encourage members to support this and have the government go back and negotiate. Failing that, I accept that the government has made a commitment to refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future for public hearings. Provided that those hearings are open enough and that the opportunity for members to make motions is broad enough within the committee, I think that that is a second-best solution, and I appreciate that the government has taken that position.

Nevertheless, I do believe that this bill will transform the existing defined benefit pension into potentially a target benefit pension. The cap on contributions is what leads me to believe that, Mr. Speaker. If the boards are unable to raise enough money because of the cap in order to set the plans on a solid footing, then they would have no choice but to reduce the benefits. That, in my view, is a target benefit plan, not a defined benefit plan, and that's why I've been saying that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues in the other opposition parties. I believe that we've had excellent co-operation on this bill. I think that the government has shown that at this point in time, at least, it's prepared to make some compromises, and I think that's a good thing. I think that this Legislature and the opposition have proved their worth in this debate and in this fight, and it has shown that we can indeed influence the course of government policy. We can stand up on behalf of our constituents, fight for them, and get results. So I'm very proud of the work that we've all done together. I do thank the government for taking the position that it's now taken, that there should be public hearings on this bill.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and sit down. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, then the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

8:00

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak opposed to this hoist motion. Surprise, surprise. I'm going to do that because I'm going to fill the House in on a little bit of history that has happened in the last little while, and that is that we've have some very good discussions with the AUPE and Mr. Smith and a number of folks that have been in to see me, including some of the other unions and some of the other representatives. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talks about the fact that he wants the Alberta public to see some of this debate, and I agree with him. I think that there are some very good abilities for us to do that if we are able to continue with Bill 9 and do the vote and then move to what might be – who knows? – a referral motion coming forward prior to going to Committee of the Whole, as the hon. member has mentioned.

In fact, that is part of the discussion that I've had with some members of the public-sector unions in terms of some of the discussions around the new relationship and building that relationship, rebuilding that trust. This is part of that. I'm looking forward to fulfilling some discussions that I had with Mr. Smith and moving forward with the discussion around preserving the

defined benefit pension plan for our public-sector employees because at the crux of it, Mr. Speaker, all of this centres around the fact that what we are trying to do is preserve the pension promise. I'll say it again. I've said it in this House a number of times. To do nothing, to simply hoist the bill and say that everything's fine is not to fulfill the fiduciary duty that this House has and this government has to the employees of the public sector. To do nothing is to simply wait and see what is going to happen in the marketplaces and then to have all of the fears, frankly, that the opposition has put forward probably come true.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that if at the end of the day the decision is that, "Well, we'll do nothing; we'll just wait and see," this government in the future is going to have to deal with some very serious issues much like what Alaska is dealing with today, much like what New Brunswick and the Maritimes have dealt with, much like many jurisdictions who are trying now to preserve what they can of the benefits that were offered to their employees.

Mr. Speaker, to hoist this bill at this stage is to stop the discussion, and I think that would be a very bad idea not only for this Legislature but also for those employees. So I would vote against and urge to vote against this hoist.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment to Bill 9. Obviously, my colleague from Calgary-McCall put this forward on my behalf, and it's a clear indication that it's the last step in a bill if you're going to try and get it discussed, get it consulted appropriately when nothing else has succeeded. We've asked for this in many different ways. In fact, I find it a bit disingenuous that the minister would say that he can't possibly accept a hoist because when it was suggested that it be referred to committee for consultation, that was rejected as well. If that isn't inconsistent, I don't know what is. We gave the option to this party to do the right thing, to refer it to committee, to open it up to broad consultation and really listen to the people who are going to have the impact of the bill, and they rejected that, so we have nothing left on this side except to call for a hoist. So for the minister to say that this is an inappropriate amendment because it doesn't allow for proper consultation I find a bit disingenuous.

Frankly, the assault on some of our most fragile individuals, whether they're retired now or about to retire, and the sense that they don't have any input, that they're just going to have to accept whatever comes down, is very difficult. They have not only created a lot of fear but offended a lot of well-meaning people who – by the way, hundreds of towns, villages, municipalities, health services, libraries. We're talking about almost half the voting public if it were the last election. We're talking about 300,000-plus people who are affected by something that they've had no input into and, especially after bills 45 and 46, a very strong sense that this government is all about its own agenda, its own plans for what's best for Albertans, and a population that has grown tired of this kind of arrogance, entitlement, even bullying.

I alluded to Bill 46, the Public Service Salary Restraint Act, which would have imposed a four-year wage settlement on AUPE members and was a clear violation of Charter rights to bargain collectively. I referred to Bill 45, the Public Sector Services Continuation Act, which also is an assault on free speech and freedom of association. There are some other bills that really

smacked of bullying that I think this government is now recognizing are not sitting well with Albertans and are going to come back to haunt them in a year or two, whenever they choose to call the next election.

Bill 26, the Assurance for Students Act, made the modified framework agreement binding on all school boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Crown, and the Minister of Education. It became law despite the fact that the Calgary board of education, Alberta's largest school board, with a hundred thousand students, twice voted to reject the deal.

Bill 22, the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act: again, top-down decision-making, in which Treaty 8 and Treaty 6 vocally and in their presence here in the Legislature rejected this levy being placed without their full consultation and without recognizing that this would have impacts on their benefit agreements.

Bill 17, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2013, granting the minister the power to compel municipalities to find solutions to sustainability challenges, including the ability to dismiss entire municipal councils or their chief administrative officers if they failed to carry out the ministerial orders satisfactorily.

Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, is still coming back after five years, mandating the construction of billions of dollars worth of unnecessary large transmission lines over private land across Alberta.

Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. Five years ago section 9 amended section 11 of the Human Rights Act by requiring schools to provide notice to parents or guardians when subject matters concerning religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation are explicitly taught in class. Again, opposed by many school boards and thoughtful citizens and teachers.

Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, granting the government the authority to freeze large tracts of private land for public purposes without full compensation or an appeal process.

Of course, the infamous Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, prohibiting against private hospitals, actually a ruse meant to open the door to more private health care in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder that Albertans have become cynical about this government with so many examples of unilateral decisions, no recognition of the need for consultation with the various stakeholders or accommodation. I don't mean just going in and saying, "This is our plan; what do you think?" but actually going in and saying: "Here is a problem we all share. How shall we solve it?"

In this case the minister has identified some problems in unfunded liability, perhaps, with longer lived citizens and concerns about the sustainability of pensions. Fine. Why not take this to the people, have a robust and comprehensive consultation with the people who are actually going to live with the consequences, not only the boards but the individuals themselves and the stakeholders and the managers of these funds?

8:10

That clearly was not the case, and this government is now caving as they recognize that this simply is not going to fly anymore in Alberta. They're going to pay a huge price for this. In fact, this could still be the death knell for this party in the next election. I think there's a recognition of that and a recognition that the next leader does not want to live with the legacy of this consistently poor set of processes around bills which have not honoured democracy, have not honoured a respect for the public and for the citizens of Alberta, and have not even honoured some

of the elected officials, city officials, and others who have an important stake and role in that.

As we heard earlier today from the mayor of Calgary, clearly they haven't thought through the vast unexpected impacts from these heavy-handed, top-down decisions. Process matters. How we go through change with people matters. The end result may be the same, but if you don't follow a fair and responsible and open and consultative and accommodating process, you end up where we are today. Suddenly the government realizes that it's gone too far, and half the voting public in Alberta is saying that we can no longer tolerate this kind of abuse of power.

This amendment, I think, Mr. Speaker, is the last opportunity at this reading, at least, for opposition to say: enough is enough. Pull this bill. We are going to be losers as part of this government and not only the pensioners themselves, who will continue to resist and be stressed and potentially have problems in their own financial management and their own families' impact, but it will also impact on all of us and especially our human services.

Mr. Kang: We'll all pay the price.

Dr. Swann: Every one of us will pay a price. That's right.

This is our last opportunity, and I think it's appropriate that this government acknowledge that they refused to accept a reasoned amendment and a referral to committee and that this is the last possible avenue for the opposition to say: "Stop. Hold off. Pause and take a second sober look." We don't have Senators here, so we're depending on you folks who have a majority in government to pause a bit and think about not only the impacts on family, some of your own employees, our future in Alberta in terms of recruiting and retaining people in the public sector, and sending a message of real respect and honour to the people who continue to serve us every day in this House, in our institutions, in our towns, municipalities, villages, libraries, all the different government services that we've come to appreciate. Let them know that we are now taking a sober second look and ensuring that everybody participates in what will be a very significant and, hopefully, a positive outcome at the end of the day when the process is followed in an honest and authentic way.

We'll certainly be supporting this, and I hope others will see the wisdom in lifting this bill from the table. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm absolutely delighted by what I've observed over the last two weeks in this House. I've heard people speak to this bill with real passion and experience, and I've seen people listen. I'm very, very heartened by that approach to resolving this bill.

I'm going to speak against the amendment on the understanding that in the Committee of the Whole this bill will be referred to an all-party standing committee on economic futures, perhaps. But I want to talk a little more broadly about what might be considered in that all-party committee. Certainly, the issue of pensions, and I'm a big fan of looking into pensions. I think we have to be fiscally responsible, and we do have to figure out what we're going to do with all of our pension plans provincially and federally. What's happened in Ontario is really quite startling for most of us.

But while we're looking at the question of consultation, which I think is at the root of the issue that we're discussing here today, I think it would be very timely and appropriate for that all-party committee to actually look at consultation and how it's done,

especially in an area as complex as pension policy. For example, electricity is a very, very complex area. How do you go out into the public space, work with stakeholders who have really specific knowledge of pensions, and then work with the broader public, who have a broader understanding? It's the two pieces: how you do consultation, and then how do you raise awareness and even the education of the public?

What I would recommend, Mr. Speaker, is that as we go forward with this, it's an opportunity to actually look at: what are wise practices in this province and beyond this province's borders for consultation with key stakeholders and the public in an area as complex as this? And then also: what are the wise practices for educating the public, and what are the reasonable outcomes? How much time should we be spending doing that work before we assume that the public has enough information to make decisions or the key stakeholders have enough information?

Trust is also the desired outcome of all of this. I think every speaker that's spoken to this particular bill has mentioned the failure of trust. There isn't trust here. It's a very, very sensitive issue because it affects people's security. I'm not sure we're going to get to trust right away in all cases. I think, you know, you can consult too much, and you don't make decisions. It's kind of the Goldilocks theory of consultation. What's too little? What's too much? What's just right? I think we have to look at what other examples work in other jurisdictions and right here and maybe even do some consultation road mapping and a policy framework so that we can look at that and talk to the public and key stakeholders about what's reasonable in situations like this.

I truly hope that the public does come to understand the importance of pension legislation for all of us and especially our children and grandchildren. The education piece of this is really, really essential.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this hoist motion, again, the logic behind it being that we don't speak to it for another six months, in which case this current bill as it's drafted will die, and we can start from scratch.

I find it interesting that, you know, the hon. President of Treasury Board spoke against this hoist motion so that we don't stop the discussion. I think there is adequate evidence to show that the discussion never really started with many of our public-sector workers, many of the unions, that have been very vocal over the last number of weeks. I know for a fact that there have been thousands of e-mails, phone calls, and letters received by members on all sides of this House from workers quite frustrated with this government, and rightly so. I mean, for a government that loves to talk about the word "consultation" and how they speak with folks, their actions don't seem to live up to their words. Although I could stand here and give numerous examples where consultation never took place even though it was asserted, I won't do that.

I just wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, that once again we're in a position where – should this bill get referred to committee in Committee of the Whole, I do see that as a positive step. But I do need to voice my frustration with the fact that once again it's another example of the government putting forward poor legislation then being stopped in its tracks by the public, by opposition parties and forced to go back to the table. If it was done with adequate consultation in the first place, then we wouldn't

have to be here and constantly go in circles. We've seen examples of this from the amendment to the municipalities act, where, again, amendments that the Alberta NDP put forward were voted down originally, last year, and then an amendment to the bill came forward and – surprise, surprise – half of the changes in there were the exact amendments that we put forward.

You know, again, my frustration is with the actions of this government in again attacking public-sector workers. We see today that they've turned their sights onto teachers in this province. But, you know, many Albertans are quite frustrated with this government, and rightly so.

8:20

Again, I disagree with the President of Treasury Board saying that by not bringing forward this legislation, we're doing nothing. Years ago when the contribution rates went up, that was a way that several of these pension plans dealt with the downturn in 2008 and the fact that there was an unfunded liability portion. That has been aggressively paid back year over year, and again we are on track to fulfill that obligation. I appreciate the frustration that Albertans have, looking at this attack and the effect that this bill would have on working Albertans.

Again, it needs to be stressed that if we want to attract and retain quality workers in the public sector, what we offer needs to be at least somewhat comparable to the private sector; otherwise, we're not going to get these great workers and front-line staff. Again, looking at pensions as being a part of the contract or the agreement on how workers will be paid over the course of their lives, the decisions of many Albertans to join the public sector were made looking at wages, at benefits, and looking at pensions, so to make a change midgame goes beyond unfair and just is outright wrong, Mr. Speaker. That's been the voice of many working Albertans over the last few weeks and the last couple of months.

I do think it's worth noting that we've got mayors, councillors, and organizations, including the AAMDC and the AUMA, opposed to this, worried about the effects it's going to have on the workers that they depend on in order to make their municipalities work day in and day out, Mr. Speaker. These are real, valid concerns. I mean, we're talking about this bill being wrong in the fact that it's attacking our seniors. It's attacking workers who have devoted their lives to the public service and attacking as well and having negative impacts on different municipalities.

I do find it frustrating as well, Mr. Speaker, that the bulk of the people affected by the changes proposed in Bill 9 are women. I think we have a long way to go to reach equality in this province. This bill is 10 steps backwards. I do find it interesting, by the way, that if women were paid equally in this province, there would be a lot more money in the pension plans as we speak. The unfunded liability would be much lower. Two out of 3 of the PSPP members are women, and sadly they earn on average \$10,000 a year less than men. When we look at the amount of contributions that would be made to the pension plan, that is significant. You know, I think, again, because women are about 70 per cent of public-sector plan members and they live longer and earn less, they'll exponentially be impacted by these changes in their senior years and be at much higher risk of being in poverty.

Again, the government is taking a short-sighted approach, making sweeping changes right now, where the impact is going to be that we are going to have more seniors living in poverty and relying on the system for assistance. You know, either we ensure that they can retire with dignity and have the dollars there for a retirement which is modest, Mr. Speaker – we're not talking about

lavish pensions here – or we claw that back and force more people into poverty.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this hoist. Let's encourage the government to sit down at the table with not just the board members but all of the different public-sector unions that are going to be affected, with the workers, the front-line folks, and have a real, true discussion about what we can do moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say a couple of words. This has been a very interesting and educative process for, I think, all of us here in the House and outside, across the province, too. It's helped a lot of people that normally don't think about things that happen in the Legislature suddenly become much more interested in both the political process and, I think, the democratic process, too, because, of course, pensions are not just a way by which we can save for retirement, but they also provide a sense of security during the course of your working life, for both yourself and for your family and your loved ones to know that there's something there to look forward to. As has been said many times, these public-service pensions are very modest – it's not like we're talking about great riches; the average draw on them is \$15,000 to \$17,000 a year – but, as I say, it's that sense of security, knowing that there's something to look after one's future with, with other savings and with Canada pension and so forth as well.

I think it's important, again, to just review what's happened here very briefly, to help everyone to understand what a pension actually is and how a pension plan lives through its lifetime, not just in five or 10 or 15 years but more like 30 or 40 or even 60 years, as we go through different cycles of the population, as we have surges, as we saw through the baby boomers coming through and so forth. The survivability and the viability of a pension plan is not just something you can measure by taking a photograph or a snapshot at any one time. Rather, you have to look at that intergenerational aspect, which includes the vagaries, the ups and downs, of our economy and the changes in demographics over time as well.

I think, too, Mr. Speaker, we have to move to change and strengthen public and also private pension plans across this province and remind ourselves that a majority of Albertans do not have adequate savings for their retirement. Let's do something about that, too, while we start to talk about pensions in the public service. It's an opportunity for us to address this nagging question, this elephant in the room, that the majority of Albertans are not prepared for their retirement and saving adequately for their retirement.

I am a member of the Economic Future Committee, and I look forward to having further discussion on this. There are many, many intelligent people that have a vested interest in seeing positive changes and constructive changes. Certainly, I never doubted the sincerity and the intention, in many ways, of the Finance minister and President of the Treasury Board in talking about the necessity to change to ensure the viability of our pensions for the future. I think we might have had some misrepresentation or some confusion about how we might go about doing that but always in the spirit of democracy and in the spirit of practical solutions.

I think this choice to move to not pass this legislation at this time, to move it to further public discussion is very wise, very practical, and I applaud everyone who has contributed to that process. It's the way that our Legislature should work, it's a way by which we could reach out and engage the larger population, and it's a way by which we can, I think, make a more sincere plan that includes everyone, ensuring that we have a pension future for everybody in this province.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other speakers on the amendment?

Seeing no other speakers, I'll call the question on the hoist amendment H1.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 9 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: I'll call the question on second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:30 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Goudreau	Oberle
Amery	Griffiths	Olesen
Bhardwaj	Horner	Quadri
Bhullar	Hughes	Quest
Brown	Jansen	Rodney
Calahasen	Jeneroux	Sandhu
Campbell	Johnson, L.	Sarich
Cusanelli	Kennedy-Glans	Scott
Dallas	Klimchuk	Starke
Dorward	Kubinec	VanderBurg
Drysdale	Leskiw	Weadick
Fawcett	Luan	Woo-Paw
Fenske	McDonald	Xiao
Fritz	McQueen	Young

Against the motion:

Bilous	Kang	Strankman
Blakeman	Mason	Swann
Donovan	McAllister	Towle
Eggen	Pedersen	Wilson
Hale	Sherman	

Totals: For – 42 Against – 14

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It obviously has been noted that there are some issues, some concerns perhaps, that require some additional discussion at a different level and through a different committee and through that process, as was mentioned earlier. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 78.1 I would move that Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, where it can receive additional comments, and then be

brought back for follow-up discussion in the first sitting of the October session of the Legislature this year.

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is not debatable.

[Motion carried]

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has also been noted that there are some concerns that would require some additional discussion at a different level and through a different committee on Bill 10. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 78.1 I would move that Bill 10, Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, where it can receive additional comments, and then be brought back for follow-up discussion in the first sitting of the October session of the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
This motion is also not debatable.

[Motion carried]

Bill 11
Child, Youth and Family Enhancement
Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 24: Mr. Bilous]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you still have two minutes left to speak.

Mr. Bilous: Excellent. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will just give a summary of my position, you know, speaking to the fact that this amendment act is a step in the right direction, but there are still many questions that remain outstanding. I do look forward to debating this in Committee of the Whole and the amendments that I'm sure my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona will bring forward.

Just to outline one of the concerns, reporting is still going to be internal, so there is discretion about the review process used. We haven't seen an increase in the budget in order to carry out these investigations, Mr. Speaker. Again, the concern is about the time allocation around the investigations only going back two years.

So I hope that the hon. minister will engage in robust conversation in Committee of the Whole on this bill and be open to amendments that we put forward. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second on Bill 11, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014. Yes, a very significant bill in terms of its potential impact for families and children in care. It follows, of course, by five months the joint *Edmonton Journal-Calgary Herald* investigation revealing that the province was dramatically underreporting the number of children who died in care and failing to monitor implementation of recommendations to prevent similar deaths.

There's no question that this is progress. I respect the minister for taking this boldly and decisively and opening up not only the questions of the elimination of the publication ban that was in place and reversing that decision but also the recognition that quality control, quality assurance in the ministry demands that

there be more openness and accountability as well as protection for the workers, who are unfortunately exposed to the traumas of these unfortunate families every day and need to be clearly given the respect and the freedom and the protection to at least acknowledge tragedy, acknowledge where problems have occurred, and do whatever is possible to redress some of those circumstances that could be changed.

Let me say that lifting the publication ban will allow families to speak publicly while ensuring that they receive the respect and recognition that they deserve. The bill will also expand the Child and Youth Advocate's investigative powers to include not only the time during their care but two years after they leave care. Obviously, we have questions about what kind of resources the Child and Youth Advocate is going to have to do the job and do it fully.

It's also important to recognize that the minister is well aware that the stresses and strains on his ministry have created conditions in which many workers do not feel empowered, do not feel that they have the confidence or the leadership in some cases that they need from management and that if we do not address some of those internal management issues, relational issues, trust issues, it is going to be very difficult to change the quality of care and the accountability that all of us want to see in the interests of children and their families.

8:50

I'm also encouraged by some of the discussion both with the minister and in this House, that there is a recognition that this ministry has to start dealing upstream. They have to start dealing with root cause and preventive issues and early identification of risk and poverty and mental illness, addictions, the kinds of issues that we need to identify as early as possible. These were alluded to today in question period, where a child of 14 days died in a family that should have been identified as high risk from the outset.

It's also, I think, important to say that anyone associated with the child can apply for an ex parte ban on publication and that a judge would have to consider the best interests of the family and especially the siblings of the dead child and the known wishes, if there were any, of the deceased child. These are all indications that we're moving forward with a more humane, accountable, and effective child care ministry.

Internally the council for quality assurance already has the power to appoint an expert panel to review child deaths and make those reports public, but under this new bill the council could also appoint committees to study, assess, and evaluate the provision of intervention services. That's progress. In addition, the director of children's services has the option to conduct an internal review and will be required to publicly report the findings and recommendations from those internal reviews along with the responses and recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm cautiously optimistic that this bill is going to move us to a very much more robust and constructive, hopefully, climate and culture, that are shifting in the ministry. I look forward to further debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 11. As the former Human Services critic for the Official Opposition this bill has a special place for me. Last fall we all lived through what has been dubbed

the fatal care series, a deeply impactful one, I'm sure, on every member in this House. This is, you know, a welcomed response, and I commend the Minister of Human Services for taking these steps.

I know that there are some amendments that our caucus will be bringing forward. Hopefully, they will be, I guess, considered at least by the minister. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, I think that the intent of Bill 11 is very strong. Even just today with the Child and Youth Advocate releasing another report of another death of a child in care, another tragic story, as they all are, you know, it's important that we in this House take every opportunity that we can to strengthen our child welfare system and ensure that we do everything we can to give the best quality of life to every child, whether they are in the foster system, recognizing that there are dozens if not hundreds and thousands of successful stories that happen every single day within that system. There are thousands of children that are in the system every single day, and we just need to make sure that we do our very best to protect them.

You know, it was an apt reminder today, when the Child and Youth Advocate released the report and dubbed the child's name as Baby Annie. One can hope that after this legislation is passed, we will be able to put a face to Baby Annie's name and every child's name who has tragically passed while in government care or having received services from the government, which is another very strong part of this bill. We're not just considering those who are currently receiving services, but if they have received services in the past, the Child and Youth Advocate will have the opportunity to investigate that death as well.

So there are some positive steps in this bill. It's welcomed. It's something that I'm happy to see and at this point most definitely happy to support, at second reading. I look forward to further discussions and debate as we move into Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Before I acknowledge the next speaker, I'd like to acknowledge our MLA for a Day students, who have joined us in the gallery.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to Bill 11. I have a number of comments that I would like to make with respect to this bill. We think that the bill is a positive but tentative first step in the right direction. We don't believe, however, that it goes nearly far enough in tackling the secrecy and bureaucracy which ultimately harm our ability to improve the lives of children.

I want to congratulate the media, particularly the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald*, for their exhaustive feature which shone a light on this problem, something that we and others in this House have been trying to grapple with in this House for a long time. There was a lot of smoke, Mr. Speaker. It was difficult to cut through it.

I also want to commend my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for her long fight to get the children's advocate made an officer of the Legislature rather than simply an arm of the minister, as was previously the case. It shouldn't take that long to make these kinds of steps, and I'm pleased to see that the pace of change has picked up considerably under the new minister. I congratulate him but also want to indicate that we will be pushing for change beyond what he's offering at the time.

It took a four-year legal battle for the newspapers I mentioned to unveil that 175 children in care or receiving services had died

between 1999 and 2013, and when the minister finally received the full number, about a month after the publication of those articles, it was a shocking 741. Mr. Speaker, that is far too many.

I want to address the question of publication bans. Changes to the publication bans are a step towards increased transparency, and I want to indicate that, you know, this has been a serious issue. Families want to be able to talk about their children whom they have lost and have been unable to do so. The government pretended for many years that that was to protect the child, but in actual fact, Mr. Speaker, we believe it was there to protect the government and to protect a flawed system. We think that that's a good step although long overdue. The government has been promising to review that ban for over three years with no action, so I'm glad to see that it does that.

I think the bill safeguards the ability of the courts to restrict the publication of this information where it's necessary for children, and that's something that we can agree with. But there are a lot of difficulties, a number of problems that could reduce the effectiveness of the change. Right now the idea is that a party must apply to the court for an order to restrict publication, and nobody has to be notified. The government is still preserving the power to get publication bans without any need for notice to any other party – for example, the media or the family – so we have a problem with that particular piece. In order to get the restrictions removed, the media or another party would have to go through a possibly lengthy court process. We don't think that that should be permitted, so this is an area where the bill doesn't go far enough, in our view. The government should not have that unrestricted power as well.

9:00

We like the idea of reverse onus. The information should be available to the public, but there need to be exceptions for the best interests of the child or the family. A number of other provinces have effective publication bans. Ontario and P.E.I. have no restrictions. Saskatchewan and Manitoba allow the publication of the name and information about the child if it comes from the family. B.C. and Newfoundland and Labrador allow for the publication of the name and information about the child if it comes from family or other sources. There are only a couple of other provinces, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, that have the kind of ban that Alberta has traditionally had.

On another point, we're very pleased to see an expanded investigative mandate for the Child and Youth Advocate. The advocate can now investigate deaths that occur within two years of receiving services. That's an important change. The advocate will also have the ability to investigate an injury or death that occurred while the child was receiving a service under the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act or a service provided to children in the youth criminal justice system. These were previously excluded, so that's a good change, that we can support.

However, serious injuries can still only be investigated if they occur while a child is receiving services. I know my colleague for Edmonton-Strathcona has repeatedly called for investigations of the death of every child in care or receiving services. At the Legislative Offices Committee of November 29, 2013, we brought forward a motion to expand the budget of the Child and Youth Advocate so that these investigations could be done.

Mr. Speaker, here's the rub. The government provides the legal capacity for these investigations to be occurring but does not necessarily provide the resources to the Child and Youth Advocate in order to perform those. That is the question. We see this time and again from this government. They will legally set out something that is very good and positive and should be done but

do not provide the resources to do it; for example, health and safety, environmental investigations, and so on. It's a common problem with this government, and the two need to go together.

We think that the advocate does have an important role in providing justice and closure for children who have been injured or died, but it has another important objective, to provide independent insight and analysis into the child intervention system to ensure that we can make necessary improvements to prevent future deaths or injuries. But, again, there need to be resources and a mandate, and expanding the investigative mandate is a good first step.

I just want to mention that the advocate has already confirmed that due to lack of resources he has no choice but to prioritize and filter the cases that get reported to his office. Mr. Speaker, this is, I think, an important thing to speak about. In 2012-13 20 cases were reported to the advocate. Only four proceeded to a full investigative review. The advocate must differentiate responses in each case because he doesn't have adequate resources, and there is no mandatory provision for investigative review.

Mr. Speaker, the advocate has to decide whether or not to conduct an initial assessment based solely on a snapshot provided by the Chief Medical Examiner and Human Services, which is about a page long. Even then, he must decide after the initial assessment whether or not to proceed with the investigation. He's not being provided with the information or resources he needs to make these decisions in all cases. We've raised this question as well with the children's advocate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona asked him in the Legislative Offices Committee, and he admitted that if he had more resources, he could conduct a more fulsome review of a large number of cases.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this is something that I would really like the minister to address and which I think the Treasury Board should address: whether or not sufficient resources are being made available. If they are not, then they should be, and we shouldn't wait for the next budget to do that.

Those are some of my comments.

We are also concerned that there is no expansion of the mandate to include investigation of serious injuries that occurred within two years of receiving services. These can be just as important as deaths in terms of providing us with information about how to improve the system and identifying systemic issues that increase the risk for children.

There's still no change to make these investigations and reports mandatory. Reports and information are only made public when there's been a full investigative review. That means that in the 16 cases that did not proceed to a full investigation by the advocate last year, we have no public information on what happened to the children, what circumstances put them at risk in the first place, or how their case was dealt with within the child intervention system and the death or injury review process. Mr. Speaker, again, it all comes down to resources.

In terms of the quality assurance council and the review process and the reports, the bill expands the role of the quality assurance council. It also expands the ability of the council to review deaths or injuries of all children receiving intervention services. In addition to the expert review panels that the council can currently appoint to investigate deaths and injuries, there will also now be committees for other quality assurance activities. Mr. Speaker, hopefully, practically, this will provide additional analysis and evaluation of the system and how it's working so that we may

further improve it, but there's not much clarity or guidance from the bill regarding what sort of activities these committees might undertake. We'd like to know who'd be responsible for adequately monitoring and tracking recommendations from both internal council reports and the Child and Youth Advocate public reports.

Mr. Speaker, these changes to the role and scope of the quality assurance council are good steps towards improving the child intervention system and identifying systemic issues. However, there are not many improvements to the secrecy and bureaucracy of the current review system. The reports of the committees will remain internal, and there is no provision for their public release, as there is for expert review panel reports. There's no change to the current public reporting requirements for the expert review panels, which leave it up to the discretion of the minister to direct if they will be publicly released or not. Those reports may contain many useful recommendations, and we believe that those recommendations should not be released at the discretion of the minister but just released.

I want to just indicate, Mr. Speaker, that there are some issues as well with the annual report. They will still include reporting on the exercise of the powers and the performance of the council. There are some improvements there.

Mr. Speaker, overall, the concerns are that there is still a relatively high degree of secrecy and confidentiality and discretion by the minister and the government with respect to many of the issues around children's services. We are also concerned that there is no recognition, or apparently no recognition, that adequate resources need to be applied to the officers, to the department, and to the children's advocate in order that they can carry out all of the important functions set out for them in this act.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, this act is a significant improvement over the existing system, and I congratulate the minister for moving in the right direction. I hope we will see more in the future with regard to these changes. It has been something that the government should have dealt with many years ago, but it was more interested in protecting its own political hide than it was in the welfare of the children in its care. I don't think you can draw any other conclusion. I'm glad that that seems to be changing. I'm encouraged by that.

I'm happy to support this bill with my other caucus members. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona will be here tomorrow to address the bill, and she'll probably have quite a bit more to say on the matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll look for the next speaker. No other speakers?

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Seeing that the future Stanley Cup champions, the L.A. Kings, are on TV right now, I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:10 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 6, 2014

Issue 25a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 6, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Each day we are blessed with the presence of youth in this Assembly. In praying for the health and happiness of the youth who are with us today, we are also praying for our great province, for it is theirs to inherit. We also pray for the members of the Royal Canadian Legion, who have guided so many of our youth along the way. Godspeed and God bless. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us begin with school groups. I have the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, who may have a group to introduce. If he does, I would ask him to rise now and introduce his guests.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today with us is a group of students from Edmonton-Castle Downs, namely from St. Timothy school, that has been touring our Legislature. From what I understand – at least, that was their indication to me – they have truly enjoyed this tour and are going to learn from us today in question period. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Laura Bodnarek. I would ask all the St. Timothy students to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other important guests. Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, I believe you have two groups to introduce.

Mr. Rogers: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six members of the Royal Canadian Legion who are here today as chaperones in your Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. The overarching aim of the program's activities is to further develop interest and understanding of our parliamentary system amongst Alberta's youth. The Royal Canadian Legion Alberta-Northwest Territories Command is commended for their support and cosponsorship of this program. Seated in your gallery today is Mrs. Audrey Ferguson, district commander, Alberta-Northwest Territories Command and our head chaperone for this year. She is accompanied by the student chaperones from the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion: Mr. Dave Basham, Mr. Barry Remanda, Mr. Bill Fecteau, Ms Lee Ann Leaburn, and Ms Judy Mindach. I would now ask that they all rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome and thank you.

Hon. member, your second set of introductions.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 76 students from 47 constituencies, including two from my own constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, who are here today as participants in Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. The participants arrived yesterday for a presentation on the role of an MLA, enjoyed dinner at the Royal Canadian Legion, and

afterward took a tour of the Legislature. This morning they debated a resolution in the Assembly Chamber, which, I understand, was won by the opposition. They visited their members' offices, attended a session in the Chamber with you, and had lunch in the rotunda with their MLAs. Following Oral Question Period they will take part in a workshop on the electoral process. Our 76 shadow colleagues, tomorrow's leaders, are seated in the members' and the public galleries. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome and thank you to all our youth for being here and participating in MLA for a Day.

Let's move on to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Margot Challborn, a ministerial intern in International and Intergovernmental Relations. Margot is a master of arts student in the department of political science at the University of Alberta. Margot completed her honours bachelor of arts in political science from Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. She plans to pursue a PhD and combine a career in teaching and public service. She's a wonderful addition to my office, and I ask her now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, followed by St. Albert.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Juliana Ho. Juliana has started in my office in the Alberta student ministerial internship program, and I'm so excited to have her join my team for the summer. She's bringing some wonderful experience, having completed her first year of law school at the University of Alberta, and she's also pursuing a master's degree in political science. I'd ask Juliana to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very proud today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a remarkable young woman named Sydney Martin. Sydney has just completed her first year of education at the University of Alberta, and I have the privilege of having Sydney serve in my office in the constituency of St. Albert as the assistant to my constituency manager. Now, I've known Sydney since she was just a baby, and it's been remarkable to see her develop into the incredible, bright, intelligent, beautiful young woman that she is today. She is serving my constituency so very well. Sydney is sitting in the members' gallery, and I'd like her to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Well, on that note, Mr. Speaker, this is a remarkably proud day for me because as other members have attested, there are some special young people here in the MLA for a Day program. One of those people is my son Mickey Khan. Mickey, I believe, is sitting in the members' gallery, if he can rise now. It has been an absolute thrill for me to introduce him to as many colleagues in the House as I possibly can. I've got about an inch in height on him and about a hundred pounds and very little else. He's a brilliant young man. I am so proud to call him my son, Mickey, I love you.

Thank you all for the very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Alexandra Rabbite. Alexandra is a new addition to my LAO office, and she is a recent graduate of Mount Royal University in Calgary, with a degree in journalism. I was pleased to have her work in my constituency office over the past two years. She has graciously decided to move up to Edmonton to help me here in the Legislature. My only condition of employment up here is that she become a Calgary Flames hockey fan, and that could be difficult. Anyway, I'd ask that Alexandra please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by the Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two special visitors who work in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. They're in Edmonton to attend the land-use conference hosted by the University of Alberta, the Alberta Land Institute. Seated in the members' gallery are Ms Rhonda Clarke-Gauthier and Mr. Adam Norris. Amongst her many responsibilities Ms Clarke-Gauthier is the executive director of the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance, and Mr. Norris is the coordinator of the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance. He lives in the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. I would ask them to rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce a great young man from Calgary who's had the opportunity to work in many different places around North America – and now the one box he had yet to check off was Edmonton and working in a minister's office – my summer intern, Mr. Sunny Kullar. Sunny, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, have your guests arrived yet? Not yet. Perhaps later.

Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature three courageous Albertans, and I would ask them to stand as I introduce them. First, Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies is a mother and family doctor from Calmar, Alberta. Dr. Tran-Davies immigrated to Canada at the age of five from Saigon, a refugee of the Vietnam War. Her father was killed; her mother raised six children. I'm pretty sure her dad would be mighty proud of how she has turned out. You see, Dr. Tran-Davies has the courage to stand for something and to stand up against something. She started a petition, that we'll table later in the House, calling for the government to go back to basics in math education and make mastering the fundamentals the primary goal. She may have started the fight by herself, but she's not alone. With her today in the gallery – I would ask them to rise – are Jerry Manegre and also Sharon Maclise, two members of Dr. Nhung's army of supporters, all fighting for our kids. I would let the government know that

they are not going anywhere, nor are we. Could we please give them the traditional welcome of this Assembly?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes per member for this part of our program. Let's start with Bonnyville-Cold Lake and then Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Task Force for Teaching Excellence Report

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The world is changing at an unprecedented rate, and work is being done to ensure that education in Alberta and our students will keep pace. Teachers are one of the best resources for securing a bright future for our children. With this in mind, Alberta Education formed the Task Force for Teaching Excellence in the fall of 2013. The task force was given one goal, to ensure that for every child in every classroom there is an excellent teacher. As a parent and a former teacher of 36 years this is an issue that is near and dear to my heart.

I was pleased to attend the Task Force for Teaching Excellence Symposium yesterday, where the task force released a report containing 25 specific recommendations that explore new ways to support educators and ensure that every student benefits from an excellent teacher. The task force placed a high priority on consulting Albertans, including parents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders, and considered this feedback when deciding upon their recommendations. I understand that our hon. Minister of Education will now take time to reflect upon this report and conduct additional consultation before making a decision on these recommendations.

As outlined in the vision of Inspiring Education, we want our students to become engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, and entrepreneurial spirits. Teachers are a vital part of achieving that vision. Our government is working to ensure that our teachers remain among the world's best by being well supported, well trained, and well motivated.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the work done by the Task Force for Teaching Excellence, from the task force members themselves to the thousands of Albertans who participated in their consultation process.

I hope that many Albertans will take the time to review the report, which has been posted on the Alberta Education website, and I look forward to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

AltaLink

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta taxpayers are about to give billions of dollars to a private company by handing over Alberta's golden goose to one of wealthiest men in the world, and there's little Albertans can do about it. The current PC government set up the rules so that private companies can use public dollars free of charge.

SNC-Lavalin recently announced that they would be selling the golden goose known as AltaLink to Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway. Mr. Buffett is one of the world's wealthiest men. In simple terms, AltaLink started as an \$850 million company. Because they are a regulated monopoly, Albertans guarantee

AltaLink an annual income of approximately 9 per cent. The public by law must pay for all of AltaLink's capital improvements. It is truly a corporate golden goose. Over the last 10 years Alberta ratepayers paid 100 per cent, billions, for new towers, poles, wires, and cables. This public investment increased AltaLink's value to \$3.2 billion. You do the math, Mr. Speaker. The sale of AltaLink to Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway is nothing more than a publicly funded subsidy that SNC-Lavalin reaped to the tune of a \$2.35 billion profit.

What do Albertans get for their investment? The Fraser Institute just published a report yesterday confirming that Albertans pay some of the highest costs for electricity in North America. It's no wonder Mr. Buffett is considered one of the shrewdest investors in the world. This newly purchased golden goose has a guaranteed income of 9 per cent, and the public will pay 100 per cent to increase his investment to as much as \$9 billion or \$12 billion over the next four years. Mr. Buffett will truly enjoy his PC-created golden goose at every dinner, but it's the ratepayers of Alberta that got plucked.

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

Mental Health Services

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Mental Health Week, and we as Albertans are challenged to take care of our mental health. My constituents in Edmonton-Manning and I have serious concerns about the state of the mental health system. Through personal experience within the community I can speak personally regarding the deaths of five adults. Two weeks ago I attended the funeral of a 28-year-old man who committed suicide. He was ready to get married this summer in June. Had his parents tried to get help for him, they may have been unsuccessful as he was over 18. This young man may have been saved.

Our current mental health system prohibits guardians of adults with mental health issues from obtaining help for those people. Adults over 18, regardless of their state of mind, are required to come forward and ask for help themselves. Therefore, neither parents nor spouses have a way to assist them. Some of these young people commit suicide or harm others as they find it difficult to live in society.

A tragic example involves a good friend of mine who was a heavy-duty mechanic and later on became a taxi driver. He was a very happy and loving man who would give anything to help others. One evening in his cab he was beaten up. His injuries were so bad that he is now fully handicapped. The person who carried out the attack had been released from Alberta Hospital and ended up killing his sister-in-law the same night.

Mr. Speaker, I know this is an issue that many other MLAs are aware of. We can start by asking how we can make changes to support the families who look after loved ones with mental health needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We have time to start one more. Hon. leader of the ND opposition, I understand you have a member's statement as well.

Government Policies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ever since the 2012 election this PC government has attacked public employees, and it seems they want to blame it all on the former Premier, the Member for Calgary-Elbow. Now that they're so far down in the polls that they can't see up, they're trying to make nice, but

they're backtracking on policies they spent months defending. One look at this PC government's record proves that while they may be trying to make nice now, it will not last.

First, the Minister of Justice and the former Deputy Premier mishandled complaints from correctional officers about workplace safety. Then when mishandled complaints boiled over into a wildcat strike, the government negotiated a return to work in exchange for a promise not to retaliate. They broke that promise. But the government didn't just retaliate against the correctional officers; they retaliated against all Alberta public-sector workers with bills 45 and 46. Bill 45 was an unprecedented attack on freedom of speech. Bill 46 short-circuited the arbitration process. We have the current Premier to thank for those two bills.

1:50

Not to be outdone, the Minister of Finance launched his own attack on Alberta public-sector pensions. While the government has put these changes on hold now, they'll continue to loom over the province while the PC Party chooses a new leader.

Then yesterday, just as the PCs were backtracking on that, the Education minister picked a fight with our teachers. Instead of focusing on reducing class sizes and shoring up our crumbling infrastructure, the minister's task force is suggesting that the real problem in our schools is that we don't have enough supervision over teachers, and they want to take away the right of teachers as a profession to police themselves.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, this PC government's agenda amounts to an attack on the people who teach our kids, who keep us healthy, and who build our province. They just can't blame it all on the previous Premier. A new leader won't fix it. It's just what Conservatives do.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're reminded: 35 seconds maximum for each question, 35 seconds maximum for each answer.

Let's start with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Electricity Prices

Ms Smith: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we have more issues the government needs to apologize for today. Every Albertan who opens a power bill has reason to be sorry that this government was re-elected. A Fraser Institute report shows that out of 119 North American cities Edmonton pays the second-highest power rates and Calgary pays the seventh-highest. Somehow in a province where we basically give our coal away to generators and where natural gas prices are close to historic lows, we have some of the highest power prices in North America. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans for messing up the electricity system and harming our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the report fails to lay out are the legacy costs and the debt that those other jurisdictions have. We do not have subsidies in our electricity system here, and when you factor out the debt and the cheap hydroelectricity that some of the other provinces have and take advantage of, our prices are very competitive in this province.

Ms Smith: I think I heard the Energy minister say that debt is bad.

Mr. Speaker, the Fraser Institute report shows that only in Honolulu does it cost more for electricity than in Edmonton, and if

you look outside, you'll see that it isn't Hawaii out there. High electricity prices impact the ability of our economy to attract new business. Having the most expensive electricity harms Albertans. Will the Premier apologize for the string of failed Energy ministers who have done nothing to address our broken electricity system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, if you look at how many people are moving to this province every single year because we have competitive taxes, we have a great economy, this is the place where people are coming to invest. Alberta is a great place to invest in and to live.

Ms Smith: That's what we want to make sure we retain, but we won't if we have these kinds of high power prices.

Yesterday we pointed out that the government's poor decisions will see one transmission company realize a \$2.4 billion capital gain in just 12 years. The Energy minister dismissed our concerns and told us that she is "making sure the prices are affordable." Well, today we learned that our power prices are among the highest on the continent. Will the Premier actually do something about this, or will he and his government just continue to pretend that nothing is wrong?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what we've seen is the ultimate conversion. Now we have the Wildrose Party pretending to be the NDP. The fact of the matter is that this is a good place to do business, and some businesses make a profit, but what we are making sure of is that Alberta consumers have the electricity they need when they need it at a reasonable and affordable price. That is part of the economy that's created because of strong government policies. That's the kind of economy that's created the quality of life in this province, the quality of life that attracts those hundred thousand people every year that the hon. Minister of Energy was talking about.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Well, we all know the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is our sensei, so it wouldn't be surprising that we have some areas of agreement.

Family Care Clinics

Ms Smith: When family care clinics were announced during the last election, Albertans were told that they were the solution to the primary health care crunch. They were such a great new idea that we'd get 140 of them. We weren't convinced, and we've been asking the government how they can possibly build all of these family care clinics without duplicating the work of the primary care networks. It turns out they can't, so we won't get 140 of them. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans for wasting their time and their money on this poorly thought out scheme?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what this government is proud to do is to look thoroughly at how we can achieve the outcomes that Albertans want, and those outcomes in primary care are health care professionals working together to support Albertans' desires to be healthy. That keeps Albertans out of the acute-care system. That helps them manage their chronic conditions. That helps them with the supports that they need to take responsibility for their own health. That is a good thing. That can be accomplished working through primary care networks. It can be accomplished

working through family care clinics. The important part is the outcome for Albertans, and that's what we're achieving.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can pretend this isn't a full retreat on family care clinics, but it is.

Even in her resignation speech six weeks ago the Premier committed to 80 family care clinics. The Health minister was talking about 24 clinics not that long ago. Now it's only nine. But these clinics have been a failure. In Slave Lake the pilot project there has dramatically reduced the number of doctors that serve that community. Will the Premier apologize and order the Health minister to stop this bad idea?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition can continue her preoccupation with numbers and talk about institutions and providers. [interjections] What we will do is exactly what the Premier said. We will continue to focus on opening the front door of the health care system by investing in primary health care, by using the financial resources that we have to deliver services to Albertans right now. If she wants to continue with her academic debate, she's more than welcome to it. This government has delivered for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before this goes any further, let's just keep the noise down to a dull roar so that members can hear. I'm getting signals that people are having trouble hearing each other, so let's pay them some respect as well.

Second supplemental.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's becoming obvious that they on the other side don't use numbers when they're trying to figure out policy, but I think they should start.

This government needs to give up on family care clinics and put its energy into improving and expanding primary care networks. This Premier should admit that family care clinics were nothing but an election stunt created by the Premier's campaign advisers, the same people, incidentally, who just might be the next Premier's campaign advisers. Will the Premier apologize for playing politics with our health care?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I would say is that that hon. member is so delighted with the work that I am doing that she sent me a free membership card, and I had to return it today. [interjections] I had to send it back because I don't want to be a part of their party, whether it's free or not.

In fact, we are actually doing the work for Albertans that Albertans want to have done. We're working on primary care in a way in which every Albertan can have access to a primary care network, access to a doctor and a suite of health care professionals to help them in their time of need. That's what's good for Albertans. That's what Albertans want, so that's what we're delivering.

The Speaker: Okay. So we've had one outburst on the opposition side. We've had one on the government side. We're even.

Let's leave it there and move on, please, to the third main set of questions.

Disaster Recovery Program Administration

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, no Albertans deserve a more complete apology than those who have been completely let down by the government's handling of the disaster recovery program. The last Premier promised that everyone hit by the flood would be looked after. Well, the only people completely looked after have been this

government's friends who landed sole-source contracts to spin the flood, to mismanage the DRP program, and to not repair people's homes. Will the Premier admit that these parts of the disaster recovery effort have been horribly mismanaged, and will he apologize to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and talk about the good work we've done through the disaster relief program here in Alberta, how we've managed to deal with 90 per cent of 10,000 homes impacted, how we're working our way through small-business claims and trying to allow these people to get their businesses back on track. We care about these people. We don't politicize it. We're not trying to take advantage. We're simply trying to help, and we'll continue to do that.

Ms Smith: Not the case, Mr. Speaker. All over southern Alberta residents have been revictimised by the disaster recovery program. While one government MLA was studying flood mitigation in Palm Springs, homeowners in Britannia, Roxboro, Bowness, Exshaw, Bragg Creek, Redwood Meadows, Medicine Hat, the MD of Foothills, High River, and many other places were mistreated by the disaster recovery program. Thursday night I'll hold a town hall in Calgary-Elbow for these residents. When can they expect some help from the new disaster recovery program, or is there going to be another apology coming for the mess of that one, too?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister responsible.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite naming some of those communities that we are working in and supporting citizens in Alberta. We have families and homes in each of those communities that have been rebuilt. We also continue to work with some people that are trying to make those tough decisions about how they rebuild, where they move forward from here. These are not easy times. We have almost 500 small-business files stuck in tax hold while they work through their tax issues. These are not simple answers. Others would like to try to make it look that way. We're here to help the people, not just to talk about it.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, paying LandLink \$18 million in fees to process \$49 million worth of payments is not a success.

The environment minister recently declared, however, that we didn't make any mistakes last year in handling the flood. Albertans know better, and some even laughed out loud when they heard that the minister had said that. Maybe this line was given to him by Navigator, friends of Premiers past and future, who got lucrative sole-source contracts to supplement the spin efforts of the government's 200-odd communications staffers. Doesn't the Premier think he should at least apologize for that?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd actually like to take this opportunity to thank LandLink for the work that they have done with us over the past year. This was a very small group that was not prepared for the largest flood that's ever happened, and they pulled together groups of people, tried to train them, and tried to help us.

The upside on this also is that the costs for LandLink are fully DRPable, Mr. Speaker. This does not cost the taxpayers of Alberta because it is a DRP cost. They're delivering on the ground as best they can in a very huge and unexpected situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Government Communications

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current Premier has been around for many years, and he's been minister of almost every portfolio, many with problems. Until late last year he was Minister of Human Services. During his tenure he fought tooth and nail to avoid releasing the true number of children who died in government care. He insists that only 59 children died, but when the current minister took over, we learned the true number was a shocking 741, about one child dying every week in government care. To the Premier and former Minister of Human Services: why didn't you come clean about these tragic deaths when you had the chance, when you were minister?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, very little of what the hon. member just said is true. In fact, we did make public the numbers of the children who died in care. The large number that he's talking about is the number of children who in some way were at some time associated with the system. That's still tragic. That's still something that we need to be concerned about. We didn't fight tooth and nail to hide those numbers. We published those numbers. We didn't fight tooth and nail to avoid giving information to the *Journal*. In fact, there was a process that they went through, the Privacy Commissioner process: asked for release, asked for interpretation. It took a little time. There was no court fight. There was no fight at all.

Dr. Sherman: Premier, stop spinning. That minister came clean; you didn't.

When the truth about deaths of children in care finally came out, this government went into damage control. An Alberta Liberal FOIP shows – yep, you guessed it – that Navigator Ltd., a who's who of Tory land, the folks that this Premier says have a unique talent, got an untendered \$25,000 contract to write some news releases and organize a round-table. This is the same gentleman who has a unique talent for winning PC campaigns. To the Premier. You've got a well-financed Public Affairs Bureau. Why do you need to get these Tory insiders to repair your government's reputational challenges every time?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It took me about 27 days to fundamentally shift the ways in which this government shares information about children in the child intervention system. I did that through the Christmas period with my staff, without a press secretary, and, yes, with some outside help. The end result: we have a more transparent, more accountable system, that I promise we are going to work every single day to make better.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sure looks like this government is constantly funneling public money to political operatives: sole-source, untendered contracts. Let's review. The only declared PC leadership candidate has deep ties to Navigator's

managing principal, Randy Dawson. Also, a couple of cabinet ministers, including one of them across the way, were quick to express support for another leadership candidate. So there's a good chance that we're going to see Navigator again at a leadership race or an election near you. Premier, don't you see that this is improper? When will you put a stop to giving public taxpayer money to political operatives in Tory land?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a totally unfair and inappropriate characterization. The government does have a policy with respect to sole sourcing. You sole source when it's an urgent matter that needs specific talent or when there's a specific talent that you need that someone else doesn't have the same ability to deliver. Those are the two criteria under which contracts can be sole sourced. I expect that every member of government would adhere to those criteria and that if a contract is sole sourced, it's not a question of whether they're your friends or not; it's a question of whether the matter is urgent or whether there's a unique talent.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Electricity System

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned that Warren Buffett intends to purchase AltaLink, which operates about 85 per cent of the transmission lines in Alberta. Electricity transmission has become a lucrative business in Alberta thanks to this PC government's deregulation agenda. Mr. Buffett stands to double or triple his investment, and that will all be paid for by Alberta electricity consumers. My question is to the Premier. Will he stop this profiteering at the expense of Albertans and block the sale of AltaLink?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We encourage development in this province, and there's a strong regulatory process in place. We have the federal process, and we have the regulator process. What's important is that the regulator makes sure that the costs for Albertans are fair, and if Albertans want to have input, if it's a public hearing, they'll have the opportunity to go before the regulator to be able to bring their concerns forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's hard-working Albertans who've been paying for AltaLink's success, not corporate bigwigs. Each month Albertans pay transmission fees, that are set by the AUC in order to guarantee a rate of return for their corporate friends. Between 2011 and 2015 the transmission fees paid by Albertans will have doubled. Even the Fraser Institute, a Wildrose think tank, says that power prices in Alberta are too high. To the Premier: why don't you do your job and represent the interests of Albertans instead of corporate power prices, that are just going to bankrupt Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day this government represents the interests of Albertans. We are making sure that as this province continues to grow, we have transmission and generation for Albertans to be able to turn on the lights. It is affordable in this province when you take out the hydro, when you take out the fact that there's not the debt. Alberta is very competitive, and that's why companies and people continue to

come in droves to Alberta, because it's a great place to live, work, and raise our families.

Mr. Mason: Well, you know, I wish this Energy minister would spare us the rhetoric and the message boxes and actually talk turkey about what's going on in this province.

AltaLink could be worth \$9 billion to \$12 billion, up to four times more than what the deal is for, Mr. Speaker, as soon as they hook up the additional electricity lines. That's an unearned profit by Mr. Buffett that's going to come at the expense of electricity consumers. To the Premier, since we get nothing but rhetoric from the Energy minister: will your government block this windfall deal for one of the wealthiest men in the world and stop the gouging of Albertans by corporate highwaymen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, it's got a regulatory process for any of the transmission or generation, and all costs, down to the penny, must be justified by the companies to the AUC. The AUC won't allow companies to pad their pockets out of the expenses of Alberta ratepayers. They make sure of that. That's why it's an independent, arm's-length regulator.

The Speaker: Thank you.

It's just getting difficult to hear, folks. Please, let's just nail this down to a dull roar if we could. We won't eliminate the noise totally – I know that – but let's be respectful of the questions and the answers.

Let's go to Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. No preambles from here on, please.

In Vitro Fertilization Funding

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One out of every 6 to 8 couples in this province will experience infertility. Fortunately, we have fertility clinics in Alberta. However, fertility clinics or services are costly and not funded by the provincial government. As a result, many couples choose to implant several embryos at one time in hopes of increasing their chances for a successful pregnancy. In many cases this can lead to significant costs and additional burdens on our health care system due to complications arising from multiple births. To the Minister of Health: why is the cost of treating subfertility with in vitro fertilization borne largely by patients rather than Alberta Health?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

2:10

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if the hon. member heard, but we actually had a question on this very topic yesterday, and I did answer the question, and I did explain. It was a very thorough question, if I may say so. I did explain to the hon. member yesterday, as I will explain today, that we are actually studying IVF under the Alberta health technologies decision-making process.

Mr. Speaker, this service is available in only two provinces in the country. There are many questions to be answered, but we are aware of the need of Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the University of Alberta produced a white paper in 2001 outlining the real costs and issues arising out of IVF and its lack of funding,

what key elements would have to change to allow IVF to become a funded benefit?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, again in answer to a very similar question yesterday, this is not a question of costs. This is a question of evaluating what is a very complicated technology, and if we were to fund it as part of the Alberta health care insurance plan, there are a number of ethical questions that would have to be answered as well. Those include the age at which a woman would be eligible to receive the treatment and the number of trials that would be permitted under the insured service. There are a number of questions that are not simple and that we will take the appropriate time to evaluate.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Studies have suggested that to have a healthy child, some infertile couples may accept a 20 per cent risk of death and give up to 29 per cent of their income. Legislation mandates access to medically necessary services without financial barriers. Will the minister review the definition of medical necessity and consider inclusion of IVF?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the concept and definition of medically necessary services are set out, actually, by the Canada Health Act. It is a very simple and, some might argue, an outdated definition. It refers only to the provision of physician and hospital and some oral-dental services, but the question that we should all be asking is on how best to serve the needs of couples who face infertility in our society. We are looking, as I said, at the experience of Quebec and, more recently, Ontario. There are a number of complex questions to be answered, and we will have some results from that review in due course.

Educational System Reform

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to public education in Alberta, this government is showing profound disrespect. It is ignoring parents and their concerns over declining math scores in their call to focus on the fundamentals, it is ignoring the advice of academic experts on the content that should be the primary focus, and yesterday the government doubled down on Inspiring Ed, using the Task Force for Teaching Excellence to threaten teachers, the minister giving himself the power to blacklist teachers if they don't teach the fuzzy math, the discovery approach, that they so like. When will the Minister of Education start listening to real Albertans?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that preamble is so wrong as to be offensive. That is not what the Minister of Education did yesterday. In fact, excellence in teaching is fundamental to an excellent education system. We have an excellent education system; ergo, we have excellent teaching. But we have to look to the future and continue to find ways to ensure that in every classroom for every child there is an excellent teacher as we go forward. That's what the Task Force for Teaching Excellence was about. That's not government policy. It's recommendations from a task force of experts that were asked to look into it. They've looked into it, they've reported, and there will be opportunity to discuss those recommendations.

Mr. McAllister: Looking to the future does not mean forgetting the past, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies is here today. She has repeatedly asked for and been denied a meeting with the Minister of Education.

Given that last week the Premier apologized for not listening to Albertans – he apologized for taking them for granted – I ask the Minister of Education: will you turn the page, then? Given all the work that Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies has done and all the support she has from grassroots Albertans, I will bring her to your office after the business of the day. Do you care to meet with her, Minister?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, I would like the House and that hon. member to know that I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Tran-Davies in my constituency office last week, and the question that she asked me was: would I be able to arrange a meeting for her with the minister? Right away the minister said: absolutely. So I look forward to seeing Dr. Tran-Davies' meeting with the minister when he is back.

Mr. McAllister: How many times do you have to be hit over the head before something finally sinks in?

To the Premier. Given that you said, "I apologize for losing touch with our grassroots, for not listening . . . the way that we should have; this behaviour is . . . not acceptable," are you prepared to listen to the doctor and 14,000-plus Albertans, or is it going to take a new Premier and a new Minister of Education to take on the file?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things the hon. member should know is that there's a significant difference between learning from the past and living in the past. I would suppose that the hon. member is an expert at the latter and wants to continue to do so.

The Minister of Education is listening to Albertans. He's had the Task Force for Teaching Excellence; it's been out listening to Albertans. There's a curriculum development process that is listening to Albertans. In fact, that's what this government does every day.

Temporary Foreign Worker Program

Mrs. Jablonski: Just like a number of members who have already raised this issue in the House, I've heard from many of my business leaders and members of the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce about their urgent concerns with the temporary foreign worker program. You've heard it before, but I'll say it again. Alberta has a unique labour market in comparison to the rest of Canada. I don't understand why the federal government thinks that one size fits all. This is an urgent matter. I've had small-business owners tell me that without the temporary foreign workers, they may have to shut their business down. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: does the federal government know that there is a labour shortage in Alberta, and what exactly are you doing to raise these urgent concerns with the federal minister?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to tell what the federal government does or doesn't know on this particular file, but I can tell you what we know. We do indeed know that there are sectors of this industry that are doing whatever they can in their capacity to attract and retain Canadians and, despite that, they are facing labour shortages and, as a result of that, are relying on TFWs. We also know that the TFW program was imperfect, was lending itself to abuse. We also know that if someone abuses the program, you should be dealing with the abusers and not the entire industry.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister. Knowing that the temporary foreign worker program has some serious flaws, did the

federal minister consult with you, and will you ask the federal minister if they will consider redesigning the program so that it can be a permanent foreign worker plan?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have to report to this Chamber that the minister has neither consulted nor communicated his decision to this government or to, I believe, any of our colleagues, counterparts, in the other provinces. I can advise the hon. Member for Red Deer-North – and I know that she’s a great advocate because she cosponsored a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce in Red Deer – that I have participated in a teleconference with all of my counterparts from coast to coast to coast, and we are all in agreement that the TFW program is now our number one Canadian priority, and it will be discussed at the upcoming federal-provincial-territorial meeting.

Mrs. Jablonski: Minister, you’ve already mentioned that there’s been abuse and exploitation of the program. What can Alberta do to help ensure that abuse and exploitation of the program will not happen?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is more than willing to assist the federal government in this endeavour. We do agree with the federal government that all jobs in Canada are for Canadians first. We all have respect for employment standards departments throughout the country, who are willing to work with the government in not only reviewing the program, implementing an improved version of this program, but also making sure that we bring in compliance measures and assist the federal government in enforcing those compliance measures in individual provinces.

Continuity of Care for Children at Risk

Mrs. Towle: Yesterday the shocking report into the death of two-week-old Baby Annie was released. During her pregnancy Baby Annie’s mom was prescribed nearly 5,000 pills by 11 different doctors. The primary doctor was apparently unaware of her pregnancy and her obstetrician was initially unaware of her drug abuse. When the obstetrician finally discovered the prescription, she left a message for her primary doctor, a message that was never returned. The Health Quality Council report into the death of Greg Price identified these same types of breakdowns. To the Minister of Health: when can we expect a real plan to ensure that the similarities around the deaths of Baby Annie and Greg Price . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this would be my first opportunity to express my sympathy to the family for this very tragic death. I actually say that in this sense I agree with the hon. member in that she draws the correct analogy between the issues related to the prescribing and dispensing of drugs in this case and some of the issues that were raised in the continuity of care report prepared by the Health Quality Council. The fact is that health professions in this province have a responsibility, and they are regulated to share information. They are obliged to share information when treating the same patient. There was obviously a very serious breakdown in this case.

Mrs. Towle: Given that in 2011 an expert panel reviewing the death of another young child in government care called on Alberta Health Services and child services to collaborate on issues of at-

risk children and given that yesterday’s report into the death of Baby Annie says, “The Ministry of Human Services has indicated that this recommendation has been accepted and completed. However, this approach was not evident in Annie’s case” – and clearly the minister agrees – can someone in the government explain to the House whether or not that recommendation has actually been implemented, and if it has, why the heck has it not actually been followed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I’d like to say that one of the things that I’m looking to do with the passage of Bill 11 is ensure that all recommendations are tracked, the response from government is reported, and then the Health Quality Council will ensure that the recommendations and the actions are actually followed up on. That’s a change I am looking to make with the passage of this bill.

Further, in 2012 the AVIRT teams in Calgary and Edmonton were established, which are multidisciplinary teams between justice, health, and children’s services, to work with high-needs infants.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Towle: Sadly, those recommendations were three years ago.

Given that Human Services and Alberta Health are two massive ministries and that three years ago another death of a child in care report tasked the ministries to work together in cases of at-risk children and given that three years later the Child and Youth Advocate has indicated that these past recommendations continue to be ignored, Ministers, clearly there’s a problem. How can you tell Albertans that all recommendations are being followed or have been implemented when there’s a 14-day-old baby who just finished dying and we still have not had your ministries figure this out?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to really caution this hon. member in making generalizations about this case or any other. The fact is that my ministry works very closely with the Ministry of Human Services in a number of areas that pertain to children at risk. But in the final analysis there can be no excuse for the failure of health care providers to exercise appropriate oversight over the prescribing and dispensing of medication, nor can they ignore the responsibility to share information about common patients to ensure that these sorts of situations are identified and acted upon before these sorts of tragic circumstances occur.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Support for Vulnerable Albertans

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta’s Social Policy Framework touts commitment to ensuring, quote, resources for success and well-being, end quote, yet children and vulnerable Albertans on meagre assistance in this high-cost province have no annual cost-of-living increase, are undermined by clawbacks of earned assets, and even social housing applicants are excluded if their pension fund exceeds \$7,000. To the minister: do you not recognize that a registered disability pension plan or education savings plans clawback at \$7,000 for people needing social

housing is mean-spirited and contrary to your own policy framework?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the member actually brings up a good point. This is something that I've had some discussions on very recently with members of the poverty action groups across Alberta, particularly in Calgary, and this is something that I've committed to them, that I will start to evaluate and see if there are some specific areas here that require some adjustments.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, when will the minister index the meagre income received under AISH and Alberta Works for our most vulnerable Albertans, including children, and genuinely give them a hand up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, our AISH payments are, in fact, the highest in the country. They went up over \$400 recently. In addition, individuals are able to apply for and receive various other mechanisms for assistance as well. In Alberta when people need a hand up, when they need some assistance, it's there for them.

Dr. Swann: So I guess the cost-of-living increase is only reserved for members of the Legislature.

How can this minister argue that \$933 a month for a single mother and child – \$933 a month for a single mother and child – builds capacity for success and well-being?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I didn't know the member opposite was receiving wage increases every year. We aren't, and it's better that way.

Regardless, Mr. Speaker, the point is that there's a variety of different systems and tools and programs in place to support vulnerable Albertans, and they'll be there in a balanced way to ensure that people are protected when they need it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Primary Health Care Delivery

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Broken promises and wasting time and money. This PC government was elected on a plan to build 140 family care clinics, but last week the Minister of Health admitted that only 8 per cent of that promise will be fulfilled. Albertans don't want excuses; they want results. Will the Minister of Health please explain why he spent two years pumping out empty rhetoric about family care clinics? Was this just another cheap trick to get elected?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what we did last week at an important announcement, that the hon. member was only too happy to attend, was unveil a very comprehensive primary health care strategy for Alberta that talked about the role of both family care clinics and primary care networks in delivering primary health care services to Albertans. That announcement included an additional \$79 million investment as part of Budget 2014 to support services like same-day and next-day access to health care services for citizens of this province.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that instead of delivering on these promised family care clinics, this government doubled down on primary care networks, to the Minister of Health: why did you abandon the publicly owned family care model, which is a very, very good model, by the way, and hand it over to a private consortium of doctors?

Mr. Horne: Well, I'm not sure I understand the question. It sounded at the beginning like the hon. member was expressing preference for a family care clinic model over a primary care network. Whatever he may have been alluding to, what I can say is that our commitment is to use the financial resources that have been invested by Albertans in the budget of the Ministry of Health to deliver health care services to people that need them right now, and that's true, Mr. Speaker, whether it's a primary care network or a family care clinic or any one of a number of other innovative models that are out there in the health care system today.

Mr. Eggen: You know, that's very interesting, Mr. Speaker. Given that for more than two years we waited, with community health sitting in limbo, while 137 of the 140 family care clinics failed to materialize, can the minister account for all of the lost health care during this time: the measles epidemic, mental health, overcrowded emergency rooms, and much, much more?

Mr. Horne: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understand the point of the question. What I can tell the hon. member is that all of the things that he talked about continue to be funded and continue to be priorities for this government. Things as basic as vaccination against childhood diseases are, in fact, part of primary health care, as are the other things that he mentioned in his list. What would be very interesting is to hear the hon. member talk about the importance of primary health care, how we need to stop doing things in the hospital that we can and should do in the community and get behind the front-line health care professionals in Alberta who are doing exactly that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Electricity Prices

(continued)

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to boast about how well the Alberta electricity system is working. Unfortunately, Albertans don't buy their propaganda or spin. The Fraser Institute confirmed yesterday what Albertans already know: Albertans pay some of the highest costs for electricity in North America. To the minister: can you at least emulate your leader and give Albertans an insincere apology for this failure to deliver lower electricity utility bills?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said – and perhaps he wasn't listening to his leader's questions because it sounds remotely the same. I'll give the same answer. When you take away the hydro piece and you look at the debt, Alberta is very competitive. Why do you think so many people are moving to Alberta and coming to invest in Alberta? It's because this is a great place to live, work, and do business.

2:30

Mr. Anglin: At least it was insincere.

Can the minister explain why she believes the market is working for Albertans when two independent, separate studies

now confirm that out of 119 cities studied, only Honolulu pays more for electricity than Edmonton small businesses?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is rewind, but that's okay, and I sincerely mean that so that you're not offended. [interjections] In Alberta private operators build and they invest in infrastructure. I would like to know if that hon. member and that hon. party would prefer that we re-regulate the system and not allow open and competitive markets in Alberta. This government believes in open and competitive markets, and our electricity prices are affordable in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Let's try this again.

Mr. Anglin: That's so inaccurate that that's offensive to all Albertans.

Given that we are an energy-producing province and not an island in the Pacific that has to import just about everything – aloha – why should Albertans trust this government when the minister continues to claim that electricity costs are low when everyone can plainly see that the total cost of an electric utility bill has doubled over the years and that it continues to go up?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Frankly, sincerely, I'd like you to know and the House to know and Albertans to know that over the past 10 years electricity prices in Alberta have actually been competitive with all other provinces that do not have access to cheap hydroelectricity. I wish we had cheap hydroelectricity in this province, but we don't. But we're competitive. We don't have the debt that those other provinces carry. [interjections] The reason people come to Alberta is because this is a great place to invest.

The Speaker: Just a little too much bantering across the bow from both sides there.

Let's go on to Edmonton-South West and see if we can be heard.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many Albertans, I'm glad to see institutions of postsecondary education in this province receive a funding boost from last year's budget. Talking with those who attend or are employed by these institutions has shown me that these increases are enthusiastically welcomed, especially considering that this funding will assist the construction of new learning and research facilities. However, that's where the good news of my preamble ends. The fact remains that funding levels have not recovered to the point they were at prior to Budget 2013. My question is to the Premier. Can we still expect additional funding increases for Alberta postsecondary education? Assuming it's yes, what size of increases can . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we just passed this year's budget last week or the week before, so we shouldn't get too excited about next year's yet, but I would say this. Postsecondary institutions across the province did the same thing that government did last year, and that is going through results-based budgeting processes, looking to make sure that they're spending their money in the most effective way to achieve the results for Albertans. This year we were able to add \$32 million to

those budgets to fund programs that institutions themselves said met student needs or met economic demand. That's what we need to do, and that's what we're working on with the postsecondaries, making sure that we're funding in a targeted way to deal with those programs that they think are important.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always excited for the next budget day.

My next question is to the Premier. Given that there are employment incentives for young Albertans to forgo postsecondary education in favour of entering the workforce right away, what is being done with college and university administrations to encourage young Albertans to enrol and not just simply enter the workforce directly from high school?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of programs that we have under way, including dual-credit strategies, that we're working with the K to 12 system on so that students can experience postsecondary courses while they're still in high school and ease the transition. We also have the registered apprenticeship program, which helps to do the same thing. But we also go out actively with the Learning Clicks program, which helps students understand what kind of postsecondary programs are available to them and what the long-term benefits are, and an ambassadors program, which reaches about 22,000 students every year, encouraging them to understand the value, the benefit, and the opportunities of a postsecondary education.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's Mental Health Week, as referenced earlier by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, this question is to the Minister of Health. We have a lot of students who have benefited from the initial influx of mental health funding at postsecondary institutions; however, they could do just so much more if they had additional resources. Minister, what further is being done to promote and protect mental health amongst our student population?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're doing a great deal, or I should say that the students themselves are doing a great deal. Currently we are providing grants of \$3 million in total to the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge and another \$1.5 million to the Alberta Students' Executive Council. I've had an opportunity, as I think the hon. member has, to learn what students in Alberta postsecondary institutions have done with this money in terms of supporting direct treatment, peer support, and raising awareness about this very important issue. This is money well invested, and we'll look to do what we can to enhance it.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Construction Labour Legislation Review

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 John Hope and Dwayne Chomyn were asked to study and report on construction labour relations in Alberta. Several specific, critical areas were suggested for analysis and inclusion. The study or report was prepared and presented to the minister but never released. Will

this PC government's claim of gold-standard transparency actually materialize in the form of the Hope-Chomyn report being shared with all MLAs and the public, or is it really just iron pyrites?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, indeed, both lawyers, Mr. Chomyn and Mr. Hope, have provided legal advice to the minister, advising the minister that a review of the labour code needs to happen. Mr. Andy Sims, a well-respected lawyer, has conducted a review. His report has been released. Government has adopted all of Mr. Sims' recommendations. I know that this fall negotiations are beginning to happen with building trades and owners, and we are ready to proceed as long as the caucus is ready to proceed with this matter through legislation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister asked Hope and Chomyn for a labour diagnosis, which he clearly didn't like, then asked for a second opinion, which he's had for five months and only released last week, how can the MLAs and the public and the parties directly involved with construction and labour in Alberta have confidence in the latest report? Why the haste or the announced haste, anyway, to propose legislation without a full review and further involvement from all the stakeholders?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is rather interesting that this member knows what's in the report that wasn't released but has no clue what's in the report that was released. The report that was released gives very clear recommendations to our government. A lengthy consultation took place with Merit Contractors, with CLAC, with owners, with building trades. Six recommendations, following four years of recommendations, have been given. Government has adopted those recommendations, and we're ready to proceed on this particular file.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has had significant construction labour peace for the past 20 years, which many believe is largely due to the competition for skilled trades and crafts and the various unions and associations that provide them, doesn't the minister realize that it would be prudent to take the time to fully engage all of the stakeholders, as they're all clamouring to do and have announced this week in press releases and so on, seeking first to understand and then to be understood so that a synergistic bill could be prepared and presented to the Legislature?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, all stakeholders have been consulted on this matter for over four years right now. They have had ample opportunity to provide valuable input. Mr. Sims has worked with all stakeholders diligently. He has produced six recommendations. We have reviewed them as government. We have adopted those recommendations. Legislation is in the process of being drafted, and subject to this Chamber and particularly to caucus as well we're ready to go ahead on this file.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Little Bow.

2:40

Innovation System

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We as a province have a long history of innovation, from the Alberta Research Council to the Alberta Innovates companies, and last week the Premier

agreed to the establishment of an innovation council. Can the Premier advise the research and business community how this next creation will improve and increase innovation development in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had a very good year, actually, in terms of working together with the innovation ecosystem in this province to try to create better synergies and better opportunities. We had, out of the Emerson report, a recommendation for an applied research institute. The expert panel then was set up and studied it and consulted with the stakeholders. Just this last week we had a very important forum with stakeholders in the innovation community, where we talked about what the policy going forward needs to be and what the operational strategies need to be, and we'll be very near a report on that within the month.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Premier. For those risk takers, inventors, and researchers throughout Alberta how will the capital forum mentioned in last week's event increase opportunities for commercialization of their discoveries?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely, one of the things that's important to Alberta innovation is how innovators can access patient capital; in essence, early-stage capital, prototype capital, venture capital, all types of capital for patient capital, as it's described. We have had very successful ventures into that area with Alberta Enterprise Corporation, the AVAC, and others in which we've been able to provide funds for funds and to fund opportunities, nine new venture capital operations in this province, so a number of different ways. But there is much, much more work to do, and we're very actively working with the community to do it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. What is the expected time frame for the council and the forum to be established and operational?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We indicated to the forum that we would like to have all of the structure put in place within the next month. We'll be bringing it through government for approval. The hon. member mentioned announcing the innovation council. We're not quite there yet. We actually talked about creating an innovation council. We'll bring it through for approval. We hope to have it in place by the end of June and operational by the end of the summer.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time for question period has expired.

Could we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the winners of the Think Globally Art Contest, whose submissions will be included in the coffee-table book *Alberta through the eyes of our youth*, which will be showcased in our international offices and given as a gift to visiting dignitaries. This morning on behalf of the Minister of Education I had the chance to help launch the book and meet with these talented K to 12 students from across the province and view their artistic submissions, that allow them to reflect on Alberta and promote its vibrant and diverse qualities to the rest of the world.

Joining us today are four students and their families. I ask that they please rise and remain standing as I call out their names: Estelle Osi, winner, grade 2 to 3 category, and her family; Emmy Wyatt, winner, grade 7 to 9 category, and family; Rebecca Jabbour, winner, grade 10 to 12 category, and her mother; and Gloria Tse, honourable mention, grade 10 to 12 category, and family. I would also like to recognize those with winning and honourable mention submissions unable to join us today: Mackenzie Chamzuk, Nova Land, Michelle Mo, Kenna McIntosh, Megan McLeod, Yuyang Yan. The students are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask my colleagues to please give them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us resume with members' statements, starting with the Calgary-Hawwood, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Skilled Labour Shortage

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Labour shortages in Alberta have been increasingly recognized as a challenge to sustaining our continued economic boom. What has made it even worse was that last year in Alberta 11,000 Albertans dropped out of high school. In addition, about 65 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 were not enrolled in university, college, or trade and technical institutions. Clearly, there is some gap between the demand and the supply of skilled labour in Alberta.

A recent report by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, entitled *Upskilling the Workforce: Employer-Sponsored Training and Resolving the Skills Gap*, suggests that government should become proactively involved, either directly or indirectly supporting employers to provide training to upgrade essential skills. The report further identified that the government needs to provide incentives for first-time employers such as those in the retail trade to invest in employer training, embed literacy and essential skills into professional requirements and training programs, and facilitate partnerships to help develop literacy and essential skills for employees.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to call upon hon. members of this House to join me to urge the government of Alberta to develop a comprehensive provincial solution to meet the needs of labour shortages in Alberta. This can be done by incorporating the many recommendations mentioned already and by expanding some of the existing programs that work such as dual credit and off-campus education. Addressing future labour shortages will ensure that Alberta is able to maintain its competitive advantage to grow and prosper.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Family Caregivers

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this week is national Family Caregiver Week, a special week to acknowledge the tremendous work done by family caregivers. Today I would like to join with the Caregiver Coalition of Southeast Alberta and the constituents of Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat in recognizing the outstanding contributions of family caregivers to the quality of life for so many Albertans.

For many people the hard work they do caring for loved ones is second nature, and they do not see themselves as so-called caregivers. This is a week to recognize their important contributions caring for our most vulnerable. The kind of care being provided ranges from the everyday to the unique. Many of these tasks are so important, yet we seldom think about them until the help is needed. These tasks include providing transportation, housework, outdoor chores, helping with medical treatments, and providing personal care. Many times family members make personal and financial sacrifices in order to care for their loved ones.

In the *Portrait of Caregivers, 2012*, by Statistics Canada nearly half of Canadians over 15 are shown to have provided care to a family member or friend with a long-term health condition, disability, or aging needs. The report identified age-related needs as the single most common problem requiring help from caregivers. This was followed by cancer, cardiovascular disease, mental illness, and Alzheimer's disease. Overall, caregivers spend a median of three hours each week providing care for a disabled family member or a friend.

Mr. Speaker, our family caregivers are so important. They are the first line of defence for many Albertans, and the work they do is critical to the overall patient care and comfort of our most vulnerable. Please join me in thanking our family caregivers and the Caregiver Coalition of Southeast Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, I believe you have a special report you wish to present at this time.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I would like to report that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that Bill Pr. 1, the Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014, proceed in this Assembly and that Bill Pr. 2, the Maskwachee Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014, proceed in the Assembly.

I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you've heard the request. Does the Assembly concur in the report? If you do, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed should say no.

Accordingly, it's unanimously carried and so ordered.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park with a bill.

Bill 13
Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 13, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

Alberta's growth over the last decade has also resulted in growth in the condominium industry, with more homebuyers choosing to live, work, and invest in condominiums. Condominiums play an increasingly important role in meeting Alberta's housing needs and are a preferred option for many first-time homebuyers and retirees. There are thousands of condominium corporations located throughout Alberta. Approximately 20 per cent of homes sold in Alberta are now condominium units. In Edmonton and Calgary condominium sales account for 1 in every 3 homes sold. The Condominium Property Act establishes the framework for the development, sale, and governance of all types of condominiums, including residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects. It sets out rules of operation and obligations of developers, buyers, owners, and the elected boards.

2:50

This bill is a direct result of the extensive consultation commenced in 2013. It reflects the considerable feedback we have received from a wide range of stakeholders, including but not limited to developers, condo owners, board members, condo managers, and legal experts. Consultations involved town hall style meetings in Edmonton and Calgary, an online questionnaire that generated thousands of responses, and further targeted discussions with expert groups of stakeholders. This bill also incorporates a number of valuable insights and recommendations reflecting Service Alberta's dialogue with legal experts in the condominium industry.

There was a clear message from this cross-section of stakeholders that the current act needs to be modernized to keep pace with the diverse and growing condominium sector. It includes amendments to protect consumers, supports responsible self-governance of condominiums, and facilitates efficient resolution of disputes. Specific examples of amendments include improved transparency and accountability for boards and developers, an enhanced inspection and enforcement section, rules respecting the regulation of condominium managers, and the creation of a new tribunal whose focus will be to hear and settle a variety of condominium disputes. As this legislation deals with an area that is constantly evolving, this bill also updates and clarifies some of the provisions in the act to best reflect common industry practices and terminology.

This bill is a significant step forward to ensuring that Alberta's condominium legislation is modernized and works effectively for the many Albertans it impacts every day. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 13, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Wellness, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present and table five copies of the 2012 annual report of the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta. Highlights include ministry comments on the new standards of practice and code of ethics, on the college administering theory and practical exams for the new college applicants, and establishing mandatory participation in a continuing competency program.

I am also pleased to table five copies of the 2013 annual report of the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta. Highlights include approval of the bachelor of psychiatric nursing program at Grant MacEwan University, which will allow registered psychiatric nurses to take their postdiploma program in Alberta. The college is also working with Canadian psychiatric nursing regulatory bodies to develop national standards for psychiatric nursing education programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader for the New Democrat opposition or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The first is 1,514 signatures on a petition gathered by the Alberta labour coalition on pensions. The petition asks the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will ensure that any changes to the LAPP or PSPP are the result of negotiations between government and affected employees.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A are clear evidence that the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Calgary-Mountain View with five items, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Banff-Cochrane, followed by Highwood, Airdrie, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling in reference to the leader's questions today the FOIP request on untendered Navigator contracts and a job description for employees of the Public Affairs Bureau; also tabling the public statement by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind recognizing Vision Health Month; and three different documents relating to the Sims report on the labour code review, including one from PCL, another from the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, and from the Merit Contractors Association.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's go on to Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the requisite number of copies of a report prepared by Edward G. Hughes and Mita Giacomini from McMaster University titled Funding In Vitro Fertilization Treatment for Persistent Subfertility: the Pain and the Politics. This report's objective was to consider the arguments for and against funding for in vitro fertilization and explore potential avenues for policy change.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Government House Leader, you have caught my attention.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if we could waive I believe it's section 7(7) and continue with the business of the day past 3 o'clock.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this requires your unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us continue. Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you were finished? Thank you.

Let's go on to Banff-Cochrane, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table the articles referenced yesterday on the debate on Bill 204, one from the *East Central Alberta Review* and two from the *Stettler Independent*.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Let's go on. The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Airdrie.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to submit the requisite number of copies of a class project done by the very smart grade 6 students of Senator Riley school. What it is is a number of letters, petitions, and informational presentations about the issues the students are concerned about. It won't surprise you that some of the issues are cyberbullying, women's hockey, animal cruelty, and an issue that might be of some interest to the Wellness associate minister. A number of the students in my riding are concerned about the sale of vapour cigarettes to minors. I gather that those vapour cigarettes, even though they don't contain nicotine, can be sold to students of any age. Some of the kids are coming to school with these cigarettes, and they wanted to let us know and let the minister know that they were concerned about it. I will give five copies of all of these presentations and hope everyone has a chance to look at it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. The first is an e-mail from a gentleman named Richard Wiebe asking why Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada not permitted to trade in currency without special exempt status on our exchanges. He wants the minister to review this decision and to reverse it. That's the first one.

The second tabling I have is an e-mail from a Miss Trudy Pool, who is concerned that the Alberta Insurance Council may be considering altering its qualification exam for life insurance agents from the one currently used by almost every Canadian province to one used and regulated out of Quebec, which she feels will result in fewer agents being qualified to work here. She'd like the Alberta Insurance Council to stay with the current exam that we have now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a tabling today from the Canadian Somali community in Alberta, and they are asking that Canadian Somali children currently under an adoption order be kept within their own cultural families. They

ask that the Minister of Human Services demand that action be taken by intervening in the adoption order to the non-Somali family. They ask that he make sure that the service providers respect the cultural and faith perspectives of the family, in this case the Islamic faith and the Somali culture. He also asks that the Minister of Human Services require CFSA directors to involve a designated person from the community in planning a placement for a Canadian Somali child in the need of care. There are over 70 signatures on this, and they will be presenting a tabling each day.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

3:00

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our pages are getting a bit of a workout today, and it's about to continue. I would like to make two tablings also. The first, with the requisite number of copies, has 14,179 signatures, the majority of which are Albertan, put together by Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies. They are Albertans and Canadians that are concerned with the direction of the math curriculum, and they would like to see the basics returned as the fundamental teaching tool and the multiple strategies used as an option when students struggle with the fundamentals. There are 14,179 signatures.

The Speaker: Did you have a second tabling?

Mr. McAllister: I do, if you'll indulge me, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. McAllister: The second tabling is the comments on this petition put together by Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies. These are comments from everyday Albertans, from teachers, from university professors, from engineers, from doctors, from just about everybody you could name. They are not living in the Stone Age. They are genuinely concerned with the direction of Alberta education. I would encourage every member to read these comments and figure out what's going on in our schools.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much. I have four tablings. The first two are copies of the proposed amendments that had been put together by my colleagues and I. The first section is the amendments we were proposing for Bill 9, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, which is now going to a committee.

The second set of amendments were those we were proposing, mostly from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and myself, to Bill 10, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014.

Then I have a report that I'm tabling, from my constituency office in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, to the Assembly on various letters received from constituents and others around the incentives for pharmaceutical purchases. They make note. One person says, "I am on a very limited income, this helps a great deal." Others: "The people you are hurting are the ones that need help the most." Another: "No different than places that give out free parking or other perks." That's that report. I think I heard from 18 people there.

Finally, a very good letter from Sheena Neilson, writing to me, her MLA, with the other side of that particular issue, in which she supports the banning of loyalty rewards for a medication purchase

and gives a number of examples where she has seen that result in an unsatisfactory or harmful application.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the Office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Infrastructure, a memorandum dated May 5, 2014, from Marcia Nelson, deputy minister, Infrastructure, to the hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Infrastructure, regarding construction on the 11th floor of the Edmonton federal building.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there are no points of order, so we can go straight onward with the business of the day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 12 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and move second reading of Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. Bill 12 amends several pieces of legislation. I'll provide some details on these changes.

Amendments to the Government Organization Act include living up to our commitment to ensure that the dispute mechanism for both the agreements on internal trade and New West Partnership trade are respected. All parties involved with these agreements – the federal, provincial, and territorial governments – have agreed to these changes and are implementing them. Failure to enact these changes will put Alberta in breach of its obligations under the agreement on internal trade and the New West Partnership trade agreement.

The amendments to schedule 9 of the Government Organization Act will clarify roles at Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and ensure the accuracy of the act. One amendment allows for the separation of the roles of Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General. The other amendment updates the Government Organization Act to correct a historical error and ensures the functions of Attorney General and Solicitor General are properly reflected in the act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The roles of Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General are being separated because the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General acts as the Attorney General of Alberta, and as such he requires legal advice on criminal and civil matters and such on a regular basis. Separating the functions of the Deputy Attorney General from the position of deputy minister allows for a lawyer to fill the role of the Deputy Attorney General while a person without formal legal training is able to act as deputy minister. Under these circumstances a well-qualified individual can administer Alberta Justice and Solicitor General as deputy minister, and a person with a legal background can look after the legal needs of the ministry as Deputy Attorney General.

The historical error being corrected is in reference, in the act, to the role the Solicitor General played in England. Historically, the duties of the Solicitor General in England included advising the Crown and cabinet on legal matters. When the government of Alberta established the department of Solicitor General in 1973, the Solicitor General was assigned the duties attached to the office of the Solicitor General in England. This was likely done in error as here in Alberta the Solicitor General's duties relate to matters of public security and corrections rather than to a legal officer's. This amendment puts responsibility for legal matters back in the hands of the Attorney General, where it belongs.

Bill 12 will also make amendments to the Mines and Minerals Act. It will also update some sections of the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Act to be consistent with these proposed amendments. The Mines and Minerals Act governs the management and disposition of rights in the Crown-owned subsurface lands and minerals, including the levying and collecting of bonuses, rentals, and royalties. The Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Act governs the collection of tax from freehold mineral rights holders on an annual basis. The bulk of the amendments to the Mines and Minerals Act relates to the audit and assurance processes for ensuring that the correct royalties under the act are assessed. This will ensure that the Crown royalties levied are appropriate and will increase efficiencies for both government and industry by clarifying administrative processes. The proposed changes are administrative and revenue neutral. They do not impact royalty rates or allowable cost deductions.

Bill 12 will also amend two health statutes. This act sets out six proposed amendments, three to the Health Information Act and three to the Regional Health Authorities Act. The Health Information Act governs the collection, use, disclosure, and protection of health information. As you know, a recent privacy breach occurred involving a lost or stolen laptop that included unencrypted health information. About 620,000 Albertans were placed at an unknown level of risk when they were not notified for nearly four months after the breach. The proposed amendments will address this situation by strengthening the Health Information Act.

The first proposed amendment will make it mandatory to notify the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the minister, and the affected individual when a breach creates a risk of harm to an individual as a result of this breach. This notification must come as soon as practicable. The regulation-making authority for the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be expanded to set out the factors that must be considered in the determination of harm and the requirements for notification. An exception would be established to the notification requirement if providing notice to an affected individual would be expected to compromise that person's physical or mental health. In that case, the custodian of the health information must inform the Information and Privacy Commissioner of the reasons why notice isn't being provided. The commissioner may then by order require the custodian to provide a notice that contains the information specified in the order, in the form, manner, and within the time specified in the order.

The second proposed amendment to the Health Information Act will authorize the Information and Privacy Commissioner to disclose to the Minister of Health any information that is necessary for the minister to exercise the powers or carry out the duties or functions of the minister in respect of any matter under the minister's administration. An amendment is also proposed to authorize the commissioner to disclose information to any person where disclosure is in the public interest or required to protect the privacy, health, or safety of an individual.

The third proposed amendment to the Health Information Act will expand its offence provisions. For example, the amendment will make it an offence for failing to notify the commissioner or minister of a privacy breach when notification is required, failing to provide notice to an affected individual where notification is required, or failing to take reasonable steps to protect against the threat or hazard to the security or integrity of health information or of loss of health information. These offences will be punishable by a significant fine, starting at \$2,000 for individuals and \$200,000 for corporate and other entities.

3:10

The Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, also proposes three amendments to the Regional Health Authorities Act. This act provides authority for the establishment and administration of health regions in the province. The first proposed amendment will ensure that the exclusion of liability provision in the act also applies to the official administrator of Alberta Health Services, just as it did to the former AHS board of directors. The Alberta Health Services official administrator is responsible for all of the duties of the regional health authority and has the power and authority of the regional health authority. The legislative change will help protect the official administrator from legal action when acting in good faith while carrying out the position's duties.

The second proposed amendment will provide authority for the Minister of Health to issue a directive to Alberta Health Services to disestablish and wind up the affairs of the community health councils, also known as health advisory councils. If the minister chooses to exercise his discretion, the amendment requires the minister to establish a replacement body or council that will act in an advisory capacity to the minister as to the provision of health services in the province or part of it. The change will allow government to move towards establishing other councils similar to the family and community engagement councils established by the Minister of Human Services.

The third proposed amendment requires Alberta Health Services to submit its annual budget to the Minister of Health for approval. The minister also will have the authority to give directions to AHS with respect to the form and content of the budget, the time by which the budget must be submitted and any other information that must be submitted.

Together these six amendments to the health statutes provide greater protection for Albertans' health information and more oversight for AHS budgets.

If passed, changes to the relationships statutes act would update Alberta legislation to be in line with federal legislation. Since July 2005, when the federal Civil Marriage Act came into force, same-sex couples have had the legal right to marry in Alberta. The proposed changes will replace or delete outdated language and provisions in Alberta legislation that no longer reflect the current law. The proposed amendments would ensure that the language used in the Alberta statutes is consistent with the law as it is interpreted and applied in practice. This is simply part of evergreening legislation, which is part of the normal legislative process. The proposed legislation would not change any legal rights or obligation, nor does it endorse any particular definition of marriage.

Changes to the Vital Statistics Act will allow changes to the requirement for individuals to amend their sex indicator on birth records and birth certificates in a manner which is seen as less discriminatory. Service Alberta has been actively monitoring changes in other jurisdictions and collaborating with the Vital Statistics Council for Canada on this issue. The proposed amendments will authorize the creation of regulations to allow a

change of sex identifiers on birth records or certificates. While the regulations are being revised, requests for a change of sex on a birth certificate from transgendered individuals will be addressed on a case-by-case basis to accommodate those individuals who have not had sex reassignment surgery. This change shows our government's commitment to addressing this issue while allowing time for consultation and analysis to ensure that we are getting it right.

Amendments to the Charitable Fund-raising Act will remove requirements for all charitable organizations to prepare audited financial statements. These charitable organizations will now be required to prepare financial information returns signed by two directors. These changes will result in significant savings to many charitable organizations. These amendments will be particularly beneficial to charitable organizations, like postsecondary institutions, that are already required to prepare a different set of audited financial statements under other legislation. I know organizations in my constituency of West Yellowhead will be in support of this change.

Amendments to the Societies Act will allow nonprofit organizations incorporated outside of Alberta to apply for continuance into Alberta. Alberta nonprofits will be permitted to apply for continuance to other jurisdictions and permit such continuances. These amendments provide a simple and efficient approach to allow nonprofits to change the jurisdiction in which they are incorporated. Without the option of continuance nonprofits are required to reincorporate a new organization in a new jurisdiction, transfer all assets to the new organization, and then dissolve their current organization. These amendments were requested by the Muttart Foundation and are supported by the Alberta Law Reform Institute.

I look forward to hearing others speak to Bill 12. I look for all societies to support these amendments for the benefit of all Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be able to speak to Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, this afternoon. I'm going to keep my remarks brief, but there are a couple of important related amendments in this bill that I think the government should be congratulated for bringing forward.

The first are the planned changes to the Marriage Act and related changes to the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act, Dower Act, Fatality Inquiries Act, Law of Property Act, Metis Settlements Act, and 14 other pieces of legislation that will use neutral terms to refer to parents and spouses. They are symbolic changes that will have no real impact on the law as it is practised. It already is the law. But the symbol of equality before the law is a powerful one and one that should receive the support of this Legislature.

Next year will mark the 10th anniversary of same-sex marriage becoming legal in Canada. It was a hard-fought battle for fairness and equality under the law and one that I personally have always supported. As I've said, the changes we're debating today have no legal consequence for same-sex couples in Alberta. The federal law supersedes our own and already allows gay and lesbian couples to marry, but the fact is that we still have language on the books that does not reflect the federal law or the shift in public attitudes that we've seen in the last decade.

Back in 2005 an Ipsos-Reid poll found that a majority of Albertans, 56 per cent, opposed same-sex marriage. An October 2011 poll conducted by Lethbridge College found that those

opposed had declined to just 28 per cent. According to that poll 72 per cent of Albertans approved of same-sex marriage. That poll was taken three years ago, and I'd be surprised if that number isn't even higher today. In short, these changes reflect the federal law and majority public sentiment. It does not interfere with the right of individuals to practise their faith in their own way subject to the tenets of their beliefs. For these reasons I will support it.

The second major change is along the same vein, the amendments to the Vital Statistics Act that remove the onerous process for transgendered individuals to have their birth certificates changed. Once a person has made the decision to seek out this procedure, the process to make it official on government-issued identification should be as barrier free as possible, and I'm happy to see that the amendments of this bill will accomplish that.

Together, these two major amendments are an important show of respect to Alberta's LGBTQ community. The Wildrose believes that we should continually strive for full equality for all Albertans. This will be an ongoing effort, but these amendments are a step in the right direction. I thank the government for its leadership in bringing them forward. I'm pleased to support them, and I will urge my colleagues to do the same.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act.

As the chair of the Private Bills Committee mentioned, they met this morning, and Dr. Lyle Oberg and Mr. Colin Jackson, who are members of the board of directors for this school, both presented to the committee.

As I stated when I introduced the bill, this is a very special place in Alberta that many members on both sides have had the opportunity to visit. It's something that was started many, many years ago by a very forward-thinking and exceptional man, LaVerne Erickson, who started the school and the theatre in Rosebud. It has since grown immensely, and it's become a very, very hot spot in my constituency and in southern Alberta.

Basically, in this bill what they are doing is that they are updating certain definitions. They're changing from a board of directors to a board of governors, with their qualifications and numbers. They're changing the school's fiscal year-end. They are updating certain definitions within this bill. There are several wording changes to be consistent with the school's mandate.

3:20

One of the interesting facts about this theatre and school in Rosebud was mentioned this morning, that 35,000 to 40,000 tickets a year are sold to view the plays that are put on, and many of the actors and actresses in these plays are from the school. It's exceptional for the small hamlet of Rosebud to have grown around this school. There are many, many businesses that came into the area because of this school. I would urge anybody who hasn't been there to please take the time and stop by. You will be so greatly impressed that you'll want to visit it again.

The act that it's amending was originally passed in 1988, so there just needed to be some changes to bring it up to speed with today's world. I would strongly recommend that my colleagues in the House support this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain on behalf of the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014.

This bill has been recommended by the Standing Committee on Private Bills, and I would encourage all members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 11

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate May 5: Mr. Campbell]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm glad to be able to rise and speak briefly on Bill 11 in second reading, and I appreciate the opportunity to do it today. I was just in the process of trying to send a note off to one of our researchers to talk about some potential amendments to this bill, but I guess we'll have to wait till I talk about it in second reading first.

I want to begin by saying, you know, that I do believe that this bill reflects an intent on the part of the minister to bring about genuine improvement within his ministry and within certain components of how his ministry has been operating, and I think that should be noted. It's a complex area with complicated issues, and the answers are not always black and white, and I think that all of us who care very deeply about this area of government services understand that.

This bill appears to basically do three things. It deals with the long-discussed and very controversial publication ban, it attempts to inject some quality assurance procedures into the legislation, and it expands the mandate of the children's advocate slightly.

Of course, we all know that this initiative is coming on the heels of a great deal of public concern around how the system is working as a result, primarily, of the investigatory work of the media about what was actually happening within this ministry and the degree to which this information was being shared openly with

the public. Ultimately, when that information finally did come out – and I must say that I disagree with the comments made by the Premier earlier today in question period. It is clear to me on the record that the government spent a great deal of time attempting to impede the release of that information, contrary to what the Premier said, and that, in fact, the media, I think, had to devote significant resources to get that information pried out of the hands of this government.

Of course, that's frustrating because, you know, not all of us have those kinds of resources. Quite honestly, it's frustrating, generally speaking, that this kind of access to information has to be part of such a big campaign to get disclosure about what's happening within our government.

I think we can agree that we all want the same things on this file. We have some differences of opinion in terms of how to get there, obviously. I mean, for instance, our party believes that you can't separate the issue of child protection and child safety from the issues of economic inequality and poverty. Obviously, on issues like that, we have a very significant difference from this government in that we would like to do something to ameliorate economic inequality and poverty whereas this government tends to be sort of dragged kicking and screaming to that particular table. However, that being said, I think that when we get to the mechanics around the fatalities and serious injuries of children in care, we are often looking to achieve the same thing. It's unfortunate that so much of it has to be and had to have been in the past shrouded in secrecy.

One of the points that I like to make at every opportunity is that, in fact, since I was first elected in 2008 and having been involved with this kind of work in a different jurisdiction, I knew right away that there was a category of children that were not in the custody of the ministry *per se* but who were known to the ministry. Right back in 2008 I would ask this government whether the numbers we were getting included all those children who were known to the ministry, all those children who had come into contact with the ministry through some mechanism even though they weren't in the custody of the ministry. I was assured repeatedly by a series of ministers that I was getting all the information. I'm not sure if those ministers were being poorly informed by the senior staff that they had working for them at the time or what exactly was going on, but certainly I will say that I was highly frustrated this fall when those horrible numbers came out after I had been asking that question repeatedly to the minister ever since I'd been elected.

That being said, we have a new minister, and that information has come out, and one of the things that comes from that is the issue of whether or not we should expand the mandate of the children's advocate to ensure that he has the authority to investigate fatalities and serious injuries requiring hospitalization of children who have been within the care of the ministry or receiving services from the ministry for I believe it might be just the previous 12 months. Of course, one of the things we would want to see is that it be expanded to be the previous 24 months. It's good that we are now ensuring that the children's advocate can in fact deal with that other very large and significant group of children, who come into contact with the ministry but are not in the custody of the ministry and who subsequently suffer from tragic circumstances.

As I've said before as well, however, to really ensure that we are all working on this very important topic and very important goal together, we need more transparency. In my view, we cannot get more transparency unless we take the officer of the Legislature, the independent children's advocate, and give that officer, that person, who by definition is independent and

transparent, the direction to provide a thorough investigation for every incident. Unfortunately, what's happening right now, Mr. Speaker, is that that officer and that office is only able to do a fraction of the investigations that it should do. We still have the vast majority of fatalities and/or serious injuries requiring hospitalization remaining shrouded in secrecy in this province. In my view, that is not going to help all of us work together towards what I think probably is a shared objective, which is the reduction in the number of these kinds of tragedies.

In our view, one way to make this bill better is to in fact ensure that investigations are done transparently and independently and openly so that we can have the kinds of conversations we need to in the public sphere to ensure that the public understands and is committed to the initiatives that are necessary to reduce the number of these kinds of fatalities. What we have instead is an enhanced quality assurance provision within the ministry. Now, I'm not opposed to that at all.

3:30

I think it's clear from the report that was released by the children's advocate just yesterday that we have, obviously, a long record in this province and through the work of this government of making recommendations and then just not following through on them. So we have a pile of recommendations the height of the ceiling, all of which, if they were actually implemented, would probably result in huge reductions in the number of fatalities and other serious injuries that are experienced by the most vulnerable citizens of our province. Yet they are not implemented. They instead just pile up, and they kind of overlap on each other. They pile up, and they overlap again, and they pile up. Some people start an initiative here, and another person starts an initiative there, but it's not actually implemented.

So here we are. We get a report, and once again, you know – I mean, for the recommendations all they have to really do is cut and paste at this point because it's like they've been there for years, and they haven't been implemented, and here we are. To some extent the internal quality assurance measures that the minister is attempting to inject into the ministry through the legislation may bring about some discipline internally with respect to moving forward on those recommendations.

I happen to think that it is probably the case as well that there are resource issues involved. You know, I've worked as a representative of people who work on the front line, and policies and procedures are great things, but every time you add a policy and procedure, you've also added more work to the task at hand. It may well be that that work and that task is better completed as a result of that policy and procedure, but you need to acknowledge that it's taking more time. Oftentimes we just think we can write new rules and more rules and more rules but still have the same 10 people doing the same job.

Now, the other thing that's not dealt with in this act, of course, is the ethos which appears in the social policy framework, that this government, I think, is still somewhat attached to although you never know because there's lots of stuff that's produced and then, you know, added to the pile. It was two years ago; it could've been totally rewritten. But because it's still there, no one has actually rejected it.

One of the difficulties with the social policy framework is that it advocates for what I characterized as increased fragmentation, increased decentralization, increased delegation. So at the very time that we are seeing a systemic inability of the system to talk to itself and ensure that everybody is getting the information that they need and that they're taking the steps that they need to take, meanwhile we've got an overarching policy plan which will

further fragment the work that is being done, contract it out to more nonprofits and in some cases to for-profits and in some cases to volunteers. Then we'll wonder why that for-profit and that not-for-profit and that volunteer over there didn't talk to each other to share information about how to provide the safest and most rewarding environment for a particular child at risk. We should be moving away from that model, not running towards it.

This act I appreciate doesn't speak to that. But the attempts at streamlining and injecting best practice standards into the work that is done, that you see in this legislation, will be confounded by the policy objectives of this government that are articulated in the social policy framework unless somebody takes note that we're actually headed in two separate directions right now and that one of them is bound to fail. That's a problem that needs to be understood when you consider this piece of legislation.

The final thing that is addressed in this legislation – and the minister and I were just talking about it – is the issue of the publication ban. I appreciate that the minister is attempting to take a run at fixing a problem, a problem that's existed for a long time, a problem that has been unique in Alberta in terms of hiding the names of children who are the victims of fatalities and banning their family from speaking publicly about that experience. I do understand that it's not a black-and-white situation. There is a balancing act to be had. Oftentimes there are siblings who remain in care. Oftentimes the family itself doesn't have a consensus about how public they want an issue to be.

I think that as a starting point we need to ensure that children in care are respected and given the same rights and that their story is respected as much and told as much as the story of a child who is not in care. If we imagine that we had a child who somehow through accident or intention or neglect or through a series of tragic circumstances passed away, how would we want our child's story to be told? We want to ensure that we don't inadvertently create a different standard for a child that is in care that inadvertently systemically discriminates against that child and that child's story and the important telling of that story. If we don't talk about it, then we can't work to improve the situation.

I think that removing the publication ban or modifying the publication ban helps in that way. I am concerned that the system that the minister is proposing to put in place for implementing the amended publication ban may develop its own problems. With the ex parte application and the gross inequity in terms of access to justice that most people in Alberta experience, I'm a little worried that the actual implementation and the practice of the system that's included in this legislation may result in sort of a two-tiered level of access to a decision-maker on the issue of whether this child's story is told or not told.

I think, frankly, I'd like to see more discussion around this. I actually do believe, Mr. Speaker, that everyone is coming to the table with the best intentions on this issue, but I'm just not convinced that we've necessarily found the right answer. You'll be shocked to know that I don't actually think I have the right answer yet. It's rare that I'll admit that, but I'm not entirely clear what the right answer is. I think we need to have some discussions on it because I'm a little concerned that with the way the act is written right now, we may see some problems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure all members were enjoying the thorough analysis that the Member for

Edmonton-Strathcona was giving on Bill 11, so I was just wondering if she had any thoughts to add to what she's already shared and if she does have ideas on ways to improve this current legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Let's ask her. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think that it is really important that we not get ourselves into a situation where, for instance, we find a year from now that the ministry has in fact made an ex parte application in the case of every fatality. At this point it's not clear to me from the language in the legislation that we're going to be able to prevent that.

Now, one of the things that we were talking about when the minister and I were chatting is this whole issue of whether or not, in fact, because that section and the process for the ex parte application are in many cases subject to regulation, there might be some value to potentially amending this legislation to require the regulations to be developed after there's been discussion in an all-party committee to ensure that, really, every different scenario is worked through.

We all come to the table with an idea in our heads about the scenario we're trying to avoid, but there are always so many differing scenarios, differing objectives, differing agendas, so it's really important to talk through the many different scenarios that can be impacted by this legislation to make sure that we don't inadvertently bring in a system that will bring about an unintended consequence. So we are going to be looking into whether or not that might be an amendment that we can bring, that would allow for a more thorough discussion that allows for all different circumstances and achieving the kind of objective that we want for both these children and their families.

3:40

That's a general idea that I have, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I do think we are moving in the right direction. I think we need to make a few improvements. We'll be introducing two or three amendments, and we'll see where those end up. Of course, the big thing for me, again, is that the whole system needs to rest on a foundation of unequivocal trust in an independent, transparent oversight system, and we need to improve that vehicle in this province. It's started along the right path, but I think we can do better and put more faith into the role of the children's advocate, more resources, and a broader scope so that we can build on that foundation of independence and transparency when it comes to overseeing circumstances that we'd rather not ever have to look at but need to if we're going to prevent them in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

There's still time under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Minister of Human Services to close debate.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of remarks before I close the debate. You know, this legislation, I feel, is meant to promote a few different pieces for strengthening the child intervention system. First of all, it's accountability and transparency. As the discussion in the last couple of days has noted, many, many recommendations come forth. What this law will do is require government to respond to those recommendations and then have the quality council actually follow up to see if

recommendations have been acted upon. I think that's a very important step that needs to be done.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the system functions and deals with thousands and thousands of children on a given day. I think it's absolutely essential that the quality of the system itself, the quality of the services we provide be assessed, and I'm proud that the quality council will actually have a role in creating some quality assurance metrics that are measured so that we can ensure continuous improvement.

The internal reviews, Mr. Speaker, that are now going to be required I think are going to help create another mechanism for strong and robust change management processes. The annual reports that the director is going to be required to produce include numbers and statistics as well as numbers of serious injuries, serious incidents, and deaths and the recommendations and findings of the internal reviews that the director does.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, we've made changes to the publication ban, which I think is something that we heard very loudly about from a variety of different places, and, lastly, expanded the advocate's role to allow for the advocate to be able to investigate the death of a child who was not in care but may have been in care at any time in the previous two years before the child's death.

I think that these are all very strong changes that we've put forth in a very short period of time. As I've said very, very clearly from day one, perfection is an endless pursuit. We're far from it, but what we need to do is commit to progress and progressing on a regular and continuous basis. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'll be the first one to say that this legislation is not the be-all, end-all, but this legislation is a very strong step towards greater progress, and it's embedding within the system more mechanisms and tools to allow for greater progress on a regular basis.

With that, I move to close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 12
Statutes Amendment Act, 2014
(continued)

[Adjourned debate May 6: Ms Smith]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that I'm able to get an opportunity to speak to Bill 12 in second reading.

I'm just going to do a little bit of context first. We used to have a process called miscellaneous statutes in the Alberta Assembly. It required negotiation or consultation with opposition members, and there was a veto power that was involved so that if there was something that the opposition didn't like, then it was pulled from the miscellaneous statutes. But the other end of the deal was that there was no debate on it. I've noticed that we haven't seen miscellaneous statutes bills in the last two sittings we've had, but now we have this new animal. It walks like a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, talks like a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, but it's not called that. So, one, we don't get to pull things we don't like, but two, we get to debate to our heart's content.

Now, I will note that this bill was, I think, brought in yesterday, we had a briefing earlier this morning, and now we're debating it. This is not an inconsequential series of bills. The statutes part of it is that this bill is making changes to 14 different acts.

Now, another little historical moment here. We used to have such a thing where if there were more than two bills being amended in one bill, it was called an omnibus bill. And guess what? You got more debate time to talk about it because it's more complex. You're talking about the effect of more bills. That particular parliamentary process was eliminated during one of the many opportunities of government to cut debate time short, particularly debate time for members of the opposition. So in the same amount of time that I can debate, you know, a one-page bill, I now have to debate a 40-page bill that is amending 14 different acts, and they're quite different. That's the little historical vignette section.

Now, let me talk about what I like first, and then I'll talk about what I don't like. I'm really very happy and relieved and on behalf of a number of my constituents in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre grateful to see the movement under vital statistics to recognize the unique situation of individuals who are transgendered and to get rid of the old requirement that essentially required that somebody show up with their hospital surgery reports, which aren't easy to get, by the way. It's not as though when you check out of a hospital, they hand you a little detailed list of everything that happened to you.

What happened here was that someone who was partway through or fully through a gender change or gender transformation and wanted to get a new birth certificate, a new identification that said that they were now a different gender, was required to show up at vital statistics proving that they have gone completely through all of the surgeries. Now, depending on which way you're going here, you're going to learn a lot more than you wanted to, Mr. Speaker, but some of these operations are about seven operations for going one way and about 13 operations for going the other way. This is no small amount of surgery that's involved here, and it's supposed to take place over a long period of time.

Expecting that somebody is going to exist in this sort of identification limbo over an extended period of time and then be able to collect all the proof to turn up at vital statistics and say, "Okay; I can prove now that I am this other gender" made it nigh on impossible and was really unfair. I am very, very glad to see that what we now have in place is that on a case-by-case basis the birth certificates and marriage certificates will be reissued with the different gender on them.

3:50

A little bit of a quibble here in that there is no appeal process. So if for some reason the registrar is in a bad mood or whatever – you never know why these things happen – and doesn't grant the change in identification, there is no appeal process that's been built into this to allow someone to take it to a different level and ask for an explanation or to ask for it to be reviewed. But I am very glad to see it.

Just to put this in context, for any of us that have ever gone in, you know, to get your birth certificate renewed, just imagine if you went in there and somebody said: "Okay. Yeah, that's good. Just drop your shorts there and pull up your blouse just so we can verify which gender you are because that's how it's going to go on the birth certificate." Yes. I know. Eyebrows are raising across the Assembly. But that is essentially what we were requiring people who were transgendered to do in order to get identification, and that is completely beyond the pale. So very good on that one, gold stars even, except for the fact that there is no appeal process there.

The one other thing that's really important is the granting of drivers' licences because that, of course, is a really integral piece of identification that's used very frequently, and that one hasn't quite been resolved yet and is handled, I think, by a slightly

different area. If I could just give you a little shove over there on the other side to deal with the issue of changing the genders on drivers' licences, that would be a big help.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think the very worst day I've ever had in this Assembly in the 17-plus years that I have served as an MLA was an afternoon in the early 2000s on which the microphone system had gone down and we had individual, old-fashioned microphones on our desk. We spent the entire afternoon debating the new Family Law Act, and I spent the whole afternoon bringing forward amendment after amendment after amendment that were going through all the sections of this new Family Law Act and trying to change the language from the specific language that was used – mother, father, husband, wife – to parent and spouse. I was voted down every single time for three hours. It was brutal. Nobody else helped me. Everybody else had a great long chat, moved around, had a good old time in here, and I, with a barely working microphone, plugged my way through it was like 20 or 40 different amendments to try and do the right thing.

Here we are more than 10 years later, and the government has finally done the right thing in recognizing that a parent is a parent is a parent, whether that parent is a man, whether that parent is a woman, whether that parent is a transgendered individual. They're a parent. They parent a child. That's what we should be recognizing, that for someone who is in a long-term, committed, steady, financial, involved relationship with another person, a spouse is a spouse is a spouse, and that is the way the language should be used. That's what we should have been doing 10 years ago, but, no, the government would not allow that to happen. They wouldn't recognize the work that I was trying to do, which would have saved them a lot of time and money over the 10 or more years. I think it was maybe 2002 or 2003 that I was doing this.

Nonetheless, we've now had the gender language straightened out in the Dower Act, the fatalities act, the Law of Property Act, the Marriage Act, and the Metis Settlements Act.

There was one other point on the fatalities act, but – I'm sorry – I'm just not remembering it off the top of my head. Anyway, thank you. Well, I don't really want to thank you, to be perfectly honest, because that was just such a gruelling day. It was hard to be the only person that was willing to do that. It was a brutal day. So I'm very glad to see the back of that one.

Now, I'm sorry that I can't remember the particular additional point around the fatalities act, but let me go back now to the stuff that I'm not quite as thrilled about. The first thing is the number of regulations that are in this bill. Increasingly we have these I used to call them shell bills; you know, like the shell game, where you move the peanut or the walnut underneath the turned-over shells and say: where is the peanut? But that's just not a good description. I think it's now the empty-box legislation. There's a name for it, there are sides for it, but when you open it up, there's nothing in the legislation that actually tells you what's supposed to be happening, and legislation should tell you the what: "What are we trying to do here? What's the big picture? What are the principles?" Then the regulations tell you the how, the small detail. But what the government has been doing in a lock-step march for the entire time I've been elected is to move the what into the regulations. So all you get are these very vague sentences about, "And the minister can make regulations to . . ." and then there are pages and pages and pages of what the minister can make regulations on.

Well, so what? Why do we care? Well, we care because it's not transparent. Regulations do not come back before the Assembly. We do not get to debate them. Nobody from the public or stakeholder groups or any elected member of this Assembly gets

to comment on them until they pop out the other end by way of the Internet or the websites and are published in the *Alberta Gazette*. That's it. It's just done. That is a lot of the meat of what is actually in bills these days. It's not written in this. It's written in the regs, and that's wrong because it isn't transparent. It's done off the books. It's unaccountable. We can't tell what was done. It's very hard for anybody, even elected members, to locate the regulations after the fact. It is an opaque process, and it is wrong, wrong, wrong on so many levels that I don't have the time to describe it. The government insists on doing this. I think they think they're being clever. Really, it is just a huge disservice to the people of Alberta.

In this bill we have the word "regulations" mentioned 40 times in 32 pages or 40 times across amendments that are being made to 14 different bills. You're starting to get a sense of how much is being dropped underneath what's happening and into these regulations, where it is very hard to find out what's going on. That's the first thing that I want to express great, great concern about.

I want to talk about charitable status. Now, this is an area that I know very well. I came out of that sector. I worked there for half my career, 17 years as an actor and an administrator of arts and not-for-profit organizations and now 17 years in the Assembly. I still know this sector pretty well. What's being done here is removing the words "audited financial statements."

So not-for-profits and charities have to show how they're spending money because they're spending money on behalf of the public. That's why you have a board of directors, to make sure they're there doing the right thing, and the money has to be transparent because they're getting a tax break in a lot of cases or special deals on property taxes or something because they are a not-for-profit or a charity. By the way, in the Charitable Fundraising Act it does not reference the Canada Revenue Agency's definition of charitable. It does not reference it at all. So be careful not to be misled by the word "charity" that is being used in this statute bill because it doesn't mean a charity with meaning under the CRA. It just means a group that's raising money for a good purpose. Let me put it that way.

So this is taking out the requirement for audits, and I think that's a mistake because they're also raising the limit. It used to be anything over \$25,000. Now it's anything over \$250,000, to which in a briefing this morning I said, "So you mean that United Way doesn't have to do a financial statement under this?" They said, "No, I don't think so; it says: over \$250,000." And I thought: "I don't think that's what we're supposed to be doing here. I don't think that's a good idea."

It may be that an organization will be required in other circumstances to . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the Member for Edmonton-Centre was interrupted by the time, and I wish to hear the rest of her thought there.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. There is no "charitable" meaning under the Canadian revenue association. There's been no limit given. I would expect it to be a limit of, you know, something reasonable: a million dollars, \$3 million, \$5 million. But unlimited?

You can have what's called a review. I'll tell you that for a lot of organizations that are small or tiny or even mid-sized – I mean, I ran a million dollar theatre company. A million dollars a year. Our audit – and we got half of it donated – still cost me \$8,000 cash. That's a lot of money.

You know, getting an official audit done is very expensive. It was a huge relief, I know, to a lot of not-for-profits to be able to do what's called a review. You got two volunteers from the public – they could be on your board but not the treasurer – who would go through and check to make sure that there was nothing funny going on and that things more or less seemed to add up and everything seemed to be recorded. They could sign off on it, and that was accepted to be as good as a fully audited financial statement. That is a very, very valuable thing to many groups. But I would tend to say that that should be a valuable thing for groups under a certain amount of money and that anyone over a certain amount of money should be doing a fully audited statement. I'm really struggling with this.

Of course, what I still continue to forget is that the charitable world is now out there slugging it out with the big guys. We're not talking about Boys and Girls Clubs and 4-Hs and a couple of little theatre companies and a wacky little art gallery and a soccer club. We're talking about those same groups competing with universities for fundraising, competing with hospitals for fundraising, competing with K to 12 schools for fundraising. You know, get your elbows up because this is a tough place to fight now.

I think we have to be very careful. A big part of this is the public's trust that what these charities are doing is above board. I'll tell you, having worked there – oh, my goodness – most of them are above board and work really hard, with very, very dedicated volunteers to assist them and very dedicated staff. But we do get some that get scammed. More and more what we're reading in the paper – and we all go, “Oh, no,” when we read it – is that, you know, treasurer of X skating club absconds with their entire kitty: a hundred thousand dollars gone. Well, why did the person steal the money? Gambling. Addicted to gambling, they used the money. Well, that should have been caught in some kind of a review or an audit. That should have been caught so that they weren't able to do it over an extended period of time. This is why you look at those kinds of amounts. That's a concern that I have in what I'm seeing in Bill 12.

I haven't had enough time to actually go through and compare in context a lot of the other things that I'm seeing. Some of them are pretty obvious. I don't know what's going on with the freehold minerals. I wonder if this harkens back to when the Auditor General pointed out several times to the government that they actually could not verify if they were collecting enough royalties because they couldn't verify what the companies were telling them they had actually produced. This, it seems to me, is going to make that process a little clearer so that the government can be assured that they are collecting royalties on exactly what has come out of the ground instead of some sort of loosey-goosey guesstimate. That's our money, and we need it.

I look forward to Committee of the Whole on this bill so I can have a bit more time to be able to have a look at the other sections of it and maybe bring forward some amendments. For that, I will ask in advance for the forgiveness of our ever-steady Parliamentary Counsel.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

There are still a few seconds left on 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, which I find really fascinating. In my short two years here in the Legislature there have been very few omnibus bills, which I am thankful for because they deal with such a large amount of amendments and different statutes. I actually count that this amends 16 different acts. It is quite significant and challenging to try and go through and digest a bill of this magnitude within just a short couple of days, but I would like to go through it. There are some positive aspects to this bill, in my opinion. There are some questions that I have and some challenges as well.

You know, the first section that I'd like to talk about has to do with the Marriage Act. There's going to be a concurrent theme with some of my comments. Something that we've seen actually in the last couple of weeks is that when this current government takes a step in the right direction, it's because they are dragged by the public and often by the opposition to a more common-sense position or a position that they should have had to begin with. The concurrent theme: just yesterday when the government decided to put the ice on bills 9 and 10, that was definitely because they were dragged kicking and screaming by hundreds of thousands of Albertans and many opposition members to that position.

When we look at the Marriage Act and changes that specifically refer to gender in marriage and partnerships, you know, I applaud the PC government for joining the rest of the country in the 21st century as far as making these changes. We've been waiting patiently for some time. I believe Alberta is one of the last jurisdictions to make these changes, and again it's not the first time that we're the last province to get with the program. The changes made to the Marriage Act include the complete repeal of the current preamble, which specifically refers to the idea of marriage between opposite genders and its purity. No new preamble is being inserted, which I think is probably the best way to go. Again, this should have been done a long time ago.

I think it's worth mentioning, though, Mr. Speaker, that these changes are positive and a positive step, but my gut feeling is that the government was dragged to this position. Let's not forget that the decision made by many of the PC caucus members to vote with the Wildrose against Motion 503 resulted in a considerable amount of public backlash. This vote was merely a couple of weeks ago. I don't know if that was what precipitated the government to make these amendments.

You know, we've been advocating for these changes for years and years along with the Member for Edmonton-Centre, as she recently shared with members of this House. Marriage equity is something that we strongly believe in. I don't know if it's a combination of public shaming. I'm not sure if it's the fact that the government is failing in the polls after making some brutal attacks on our public-sector workers, the labour sector, public-sector pensions. I don't know if this is a desperate attempt to patch a leaky ship or what they're doing. Regardless, we welcome the fact that these changes are finally being introduced.

Under the Health Information Act, a lot is left to regulations, which makes me a little nervous, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the concerns that I have. The change as far as making sure that when breaches occur within the Health Information Act, those who are impacted are going to be made aware is something that seems common sense. Again, it should have probably been brought in a long time ago, but that's a positive step. As well, providing information to the Privacy Commissioner and the minister is important as they need to be aware of weaknesses on a systemic level so that if changes are needed, they can be brought in.

4:10

Previously, as many members probably know, the release of public notification that private data had been breached was forbidden under the Health Information Act. We were one of the few provinces that didn't mandate disclosure of a breach of health information to those affected, which I think was an oversight from day one. I think that's a step in the right direction, again keeping in mind, Mr. Speaker, that prevention is always the best route to go as opposed to dealing with complications or data breaches. We would like to see a focus on investing and empowering the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ensure that compliance is occurring before a breach, not afterwards. Again, you know, chasing after is like closing the doors to the barn after the horses are out. The Privacy Commissioner's office needs to have the resources to make sure that they can stay on top of that.

As far as vital statistics and birth certificate changes, this is something that I think was a long time coming. A recent court ruling that a woman's Charter rights were violated when she was denied a new birth certificate that accurately reflected her gender switch made the changes to this act inevitable. I can't give too much credit to the government because, really, they were forced to do this by the courts, as opposed to leading by example, once again dragging their heels.

The change to vital statistics, birth certificate changes, is going to be again based on regulations that have yet to be developed. This is a concern. I mean, we want to make sure that the regulations make obtaining new identification records as easy as possible. So I think it's important to note that proof of surgery or gender cannot be included in regulations for obtaining a change of gender in identification, obviously, as this allows for unnecessary discrimination.

Moving to the Regional Health Authorities Act, another concern that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is opening the door for the elimination of health advisory councils and possibly replacing them with unidentified bodies. Now, health advisory councils have been a good tool for raising and recording concerns that Albertans have, so this does allow that Albertans have a say in the standard of care that they receive. Changes to this piece of legislation allow for the minister to review the annual budget of the AHS as well as give directions regarding the form and content of this budget.

Regarding the Societies Act, the idea of continuance in the abilities for societies founded outside of Alberta to incorporate within provincial borders, at the moment societies must disband, move their operations and finances to Alberta if they want to move between provincial jurisdictions and incorporate here. Now this change is supposedly going to encourage the set-up of more societies within the province of Alberta. This is something that was actively encouraged and lobbied for by the Muttart Foundation and the Alberta law institute.

As far as the change to the Government Organization Act, this is a change to who is eligible to hold deputy posts and enacted by the delegation powers that are given from the Justice department. I mean, this change ensures that the position of Deputy Attorney General is held by someone with proper qualities and expectations, which I think is a positive thing, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at mineral rights, again, I haven't had an opportunity to thoroughly go through this, so we'll continue to look at this section of the act.

My only concern is that we may be rushing through this without a proper analysis, especially when we look at mineral rights.

As far as the charities act, again, the current legislation mandates that charities file an audited financial statement with the

province. Alberta is, as many members probably know, one of the only provinces who require the filing of a separate provincial statement. These changes will affect charities raising over \$250,000 a year. Instead, a financial information return will be signed between two board directors. You know, there are questions and concerns around how this is going to affect smaller charities within the province or those who aren't capable of raising up to \$250,000.

I think it's important to note as well, Mr. Speaker, that if we wanted to make amendments that would benefit smaller charities, then we should look at the gambling hours within the province. There are many not-for-profits and smaller charities that are quite concerned with how they're going to find volunteers to staff, say, casinos, which for many organizations is their major fundraiser every two years. If we want to look at helping smaller charities, then I think that the hours of casinos, that have recently changed, is actually going in the opposite direction as far as helping smaller charities.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude. Again, there are some positive changes in this amendment act but, again, concerns when we have so many different acts affected within one bill. It means that there is very little time to thoroughly go through this and to have a completely fulsome discussion. With that, I look forward to hearing from other members of the House and discussion and debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Well, I know that it's trying people's patience for us to get up and speak to this, you know, but here's the thing. This bill has – where is that darn bill? I've got it in here somewhere.

Mr. Bilous: Did you find it?

Ms Notley: Yeah, I did. It's 33 pages long. As previous speakers have pointed out, it amends between 13 and 16 pieces of legislation, and we were briefed on this bill this morning. I have to say that this is not the kind of thing that we typically expect to have going through in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act because there really is a lot here. Typically you would want to have a chance to review this in a fulsome way before you say: "Yeah. Okay. This is just almost meaningless administrative stuff that has no substantive policy change included in it." Rather, these are sort of consequential amendments as a result of other pieces of legislation, and it won't change how we do things. That's how we can get away with throwing everything together and then dumping a 33-page bill onto the opposition at 11:30 this morning and then expecting us to be able to come in here on the basis of good faith and vote it all through without really questioning it or analyzing it.

I have to say that I'm very frustrated by this process because this is not the way we're supposed to do miscellaneous statutes amendment acts, nor are we supposed to do any piece of legislation with this little notice. We are entirely relying on the comprehensiveness and the straightforwardness and the transparency of the briefing that we received today. We'd love to be able to do that all the time, but when we were debating Bill 10, in the course of that we discovered – I mean, that was a piece of legislation amending pensions, and one of the things people said to us was: "Well, you know, it's not really that big of a change. The big changes were really made when we brought out the piece

of legislation that this bill amends a couple of years ago.” Then we looked through what it was that we were told about that bill back then, and it was like: “Oh, this is a minor little change, inconsequential amendments as a result of TILMA. Don’t worry about it. There’s nothing substantive in that.” It was only once we rolled up our sleeves and started reading through that that we realized that bill fundamentally changed the private-sector pension structure in the province.

4:20

The fact of the matter is that the government doesn’t actually have a superawesome record, Mr. Speaker, of being entirely forthright in terms of what we hear about in these briefings. Sometimes we get great briefings; sometimes we do not. So it’s our due diligence that we need to exercise to review this stuff on our own and make sure that the bill does what the government says that it’s doing. But it’s a little hard to review a 33-page bill when we get a briefing at 11:30 today and we’re in question period at 1:30. And we’re expected to debate and vote on it immediately following question period.

I have to say that this is kind of inappropriate, this whole thing. You know, there was lots of time to bring this forward. It could have been introduced before the break. We’ve had two breaks. It could have been introduced before either one of those breaks so we’d have had the time to look through it and feel confident that we were voting on what we’re being told we’re voting on. On that basis alone I can’t support this because I simply haven’t had enough time to review it in the detail that I think I should review it before I vote one way or the other. That’s all there is to it. I have a responsibility to my constituents, and quite frankly, I cannot dispense this responsibility in a way that I can be proud of in the 45 minutes that I’ve had to scan through this.

That being said, what does the bill do? Well, the Member for Edmonton-Centre has talked at some length about the changes to the Charitable Fund-raising Act and the observations she had with respect to what those changes meant. We see changes to the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Act which allow the government more time to assess and reassess the tax that a person may owe, I guess, for an audit. That is going from four years to five and a half years. I’m not exactly sure where that five and a half years came from. I’m not sure what the rationale of that is. I would love to be able to consult.

Ms Blakeman: Isn’t that weird?

Ms Notley: It’s kind of odd. It’s like we’re almost sort of dealing with one particular case here or something. That’s what I’m wondering about. But no one’s really telling us that. I’d love to be able to talk to the stakeholders, the freehold mineral rights owners, but again, this was given to me today at 11:30, and the government seems to think that it’s appropriate to ask us to vote on this today. You know, I don’t know what to say about that. I honestly don’t think we have time to track those people down that quickly.

The Government Organization Act talks about separating the role of the Deputy Attorney General and the Deputy Minister of Justice. That does not seem like a particularly difficult thing. That seems to be a structure that we see in other provinces. I’m all right with that one.

I’m a little worried about the changes to the definition of the awards that arise as a result of trade disputes under TILMA because, of course, anything that happens under TILMA is worrisome because it’s all about this government handing over governance authority to other jurisdictions and ultimately to

multijurisdictional corporations that have certain rights under these trade agreements and then expanding their ability to assert their rights over that of the citizens and the elected democratic governments of the provinces in which they do business. I’d like to know a little bit more about why we had to change the definition of awards. I’d like to know what awards were not securable through the filing of a Queen’s Bench certificate. I’d like to know what problem it is that we’re trying to fix through this change in definition. Yet I didn’t get that explanation, so I’m certainly hoping that when he closes debate, the minister will give me an answer to that question. What is the problem that we’re fixing with the change to the definition of awards under the Government Organization Act?

Then we go into the Health Information Act. Well, with that one I think we know what problem that’s trying to fix. It’s mostly trying to fix the embarrassing – I don’t know exactly who it was embarrassing for, but certainly the Health minister didn’t seem to know about some fairly major disclosures of personal health information. Then, if I recall correctly, he tried not so indirectly to blame the Privacy Commissioner, only to discover that the Privacy Commissioner was following the law and not actually able to disclose the information to the minister . . .

Ms Blakeman: They publicly dissed her.

Ms Notley: . . . and then, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre said, publicly dissed the privacy officer, which was quite inappropriate. So this is actually, I suppose, the appropriate response to that situation in that we changed the legislation so that the minister can be informed. You might want to accompany that with an apology to the Privacy Commissioner for suggesting that somehow she wasn’t doing her job by following the legislation to which she is subject. Anyway, that is that.

Then we have a change to the Interpretation Act. Again, this adds an additional clause to the powers in the name of office section that allows the minister to delegate authority to someone acting on their behalf. Again, I just want to know: what problem are we fixing here? What’s the problem that we’re fixing? Why do we need to do this? A simple explanation would help us figure out whether this was something we should support or not support. Or are there other consequences to it?

The Mines and Minerals Act. Now, that one, you know, worries me because what we’re doing here is that we’re giving additional regulation-making powers to the government, and this is about how the government charges royalties for our greatest resource, royalties that I would argue we have (a) not been collecting adequately for years and (b) have not set high enough even if we could collect them adequately. In either case, what this does is give more regulatory authority to the government, maybe to collect more, maybe to give more to their friends. I don’t know.

Again, it’s absolutely impossible for me to wade through the changes that are being made here in relation to the Mines and Minerals Act and the energy statutes amendment act to figure out what it is that they are giving themselves the authority to do here, and I, quite frankly, would like a briefing on what exactly this is going to do. I would like the government, the Minister of Energy to come in here and explain to me what it is that these changes are going to allow them to do that can’t be done now and what other consequences may arise as a result of these changes. This is how we function in this House. You give a briefing to the Assembly. You don’t dump a 30-page piece of legislation on them and give them two hours to review it. We’re told: “Oh. It’s just administrative changes.” That’s not good enough. There is

presumably a reason for it, and presumably someone ought to be able to give us the explanation for that change.

The Regional Health Authorities Act. It gives the Health minister the power to approve the AHS budget every year. I'm just curious. I thought the minister already did approve the AHS budget every year. Maybe not. I'm not sure. The AHS was just doing their own budget without the minister approving it? That's interesting. Well, in that sense I'm not unhappy with this because I think that I would like for there to be more accountability and more control over AHS. I think that's a fairly standard message that we have given to the government. I find it interesting that the minister has not in the past had the ability to have a yea or nay over that budget. Interesting.

It then, of course, brings into question why it is that AHS is a separate body that has the authority to pay its staff – I don't know – 180 per cent, 200 per cent more than people who work directly for the public service. So if the minister is approving the budget, which is not an unreasonable thing, it begs the question that the leader of the NDP caucus has raised in the past: why is AHS a separate body altogether? Anyway.

The Vital Statistics Act. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Centre has done a good job of describing why it is that we needed to get moving on this and that it is long overdue and a good thing, so we're all in favour of that. That's all I have to say on it. It's good. Yay.

4:30

The Adult Interdependent Relationships Act, the Dower Act, the Fatality Inquiries Act, the Law of Property Act, the Marriage Act, the Metis Settlements Act all seem to be related to changing gender references and the definition of spouse, so those are good things. Those are fairly easy to figure out what's going on there. Of course, we're quite happy to see those changes being made and support those completely. That's my review at this point.

I have some outstanding questions, as I've outlined. I remain unhappy about the amount of time that we've been given to review this given its length and its depth. I'm certainly hoping that we can get more information on what is happening with respect to the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Act, the Government Organization Act, and the Mines and Minerals Act. I think those are the main ones that I am most curious about.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. I just wanted to respond in second reading to a point raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona with respect to an amendment to the Regional Health Authorities Act, that is proposed as part of Bill 12, and that is with respect to the budget of Alberta Health Services. First of all, thank you to the hon. member for her expression of support for the amendment.

The reason the amendment is required is that under the current Regional Health Authorities Act, Mr. Speaker, there is provision for the minister to approve the health plan that's developed by the health authority but not the budget that is associated with the health plan, that provides the resources to deliver that. The current process is for the government in its estimates to provide, in the case of this ministry, for Alberta Health Services an overall allocation. Since we have moved to the single health authority for the province, of course, the number involved in that total budget has increased dramatically. Today's budget for Alberta Health

Services stands at about \$13 billion. So the intent of the amendment is to provide for, first of all, greater accountability for an expenditure of that magnitude, to allow the minister to look at the resources that are associated with the health plan, and to help him provide some opportunity to ask questions and some oversight to ensure that those financial resources can deliver on that plan.

The second reason for the amendment is something that I alluded to in estimates in Budget 2014 very recently, and that is that we are working with Alberta Health Services to change the structure of the budget. We are today, much as we were in the mid-1990s, providing a global budget to Alberta Health Services to deliver care. Many members on all sides of this House have expressed concern about the processes, or lack of processes, in place to make sure that the funding is actually going to the programs and services for which it's intended and that it's delivering on those outcomes.

If we were to take mental health, Mr. Speaker, as one example of an area where we might want to ensure that the funding that's allocated for mental health actually goes there, one of the things that this amendment will allow us to do is to work with AHS to develop an envelope-type approach to their funding. Services such as mental health and continuing care would be set out – and, again, we have yet to complete this work – or potentially could be set out as budgets within the total budget of AHS. That would allow us to track those dollars to ensure that they go to the areas that they're intended for and that they're not taken up in other, larger areas of the budget such as acute care, which is a huge part of the Alberta Health Services budget. So that's the rationale for this particular amendment.

I thank the hon. member for her support of it, and I hope others in the House will express similar support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll look for the next speaker.

Seeing none, I'll invite the hon. Minister of ESRD to close debate.

Mr. Campbell: Agreed. I'll close debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to propose an additional amendment that will further increase transparency and accountability in the child intervention system. This particular amendment will require, quite simply, that the responses from fatality inquiries as they relate to Human Services also need to be posted and, therefore, tracked as we are doing with the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations. Recommendations coming out of fatality inquiries also need to be tracked and the responses need to be made public, and then the quality council

will be following up on those as well. This is simply to add fatality inquiries to this. Then it allows for a regulation-making authority to add more specific reports if needed.

The reason I'm doing that now, Mr. Chairman, is because the Fatality Inquiries Act is being reviewed, and there's potential for a pediatric death review committee to be established. So if there are ever recommendations that come out of either of these two changes, I would like those recommendations as they relate to the child intervention system to also be tracked. I would also like us to have to respond to them and then for the quality council to check on the completion of them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister has put amendment A1 on the floor. I'm just waiting to make sure that everyone has a copy of amendment A1.

I think we're just about there. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I want to start off with saying that it is really refreshing to see a minister actually proceed with exactly what he said he was going to do in January and start the process for more openness and transparency. The reality of it is that every single person in this House wants children in care to be well cared for. I don't think any of us want to experience what we saw last year, when the previous minister appeared not to be fully transparent on how many children had died in care. I don't think any of us really want another process where it appears that people have to fight in the courts to actually get the information that every single Albertan should know.

I have seen this amendment ahead of time, and once again I would also like to thank the minister for engaging with the opposition and trying to find ways to work with us to find areas of agreement. I hope he's as agreeable when I present my amendments, but I look forward to that conversation, too. I appreciate this amendment, and I think that anything we can do as legislators to make the system appear to be and actually be more transparent is a good first step.

One of the things we did hear at the round-table – and I'm sure my colleagues from the other two parties will comment as well – was the idea that it needs to be broader, that there needs to be a real effort to make sure that anybody who is engaging with those who deal with children in care should be held to the same standards and that those areas should be talking.

I'm pleased to support this amendment. Thank you, Minister, for bringing it forward. I am pleased to see that this extends to the Fatality Inquiries Act.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Now, speaking to the bill, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Okay. So I have an amendment here as well. I'll give you the first part, and I'll just wait a moment.

The Chair: We'll just pause for a moment, please.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A2.

I think you can proceed, hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see this amendment more as a qualifying factor that makes it so that those people who are having input into the process actually have some expertise or some knowledge in the area of which they speak.

Right now under section 8 in proposed section 105.771(2) we would like to add a subsection (c), which says: "an individual with demonstrable expertise in child intervention." One of the things that we feel very strongly about is the person that has input into the system or feedback into the system over and above the other two areas. Right now it is

(a) an individual employed in the public service of the Province, or

(b) an individual to whom the director has delegated authority under section 121(3).

But there should be a third factor in there that basically says that the person should have some sort of expertise in child intervention. This adds clarity to the system. This adds a qualifying factor that says that there is somebody on the team who has that kind of expertise. Then the report mechanism has just a little bit more teeth to it.

I look forward to all the members of this House supporting this amendment, and I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

The Chair: On amendment A2, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So, Member, what you're suggesting, then, is that a director can in writing designate individuals to review incidents that have given rise to serious injury of a child who was receiving intervention services or another incident that was serious. The person must be employed in the public service of the province or be someone that the director has delegated authority to or someone with demonstrable expertise in child intervention. Okay. How is that person different from the one that is designated in subsection (a), which is an individual employed in the public service? I guess you're assuming here that someone that's employed in the public service doesn't necessarily have child intervention skills. Okay. Is this language that's being used language that is commonly found in the act?

Mrs. Towle: It's not commonly found in the act but common amongst those who work in the system.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. It's not found in the act, but it is commonly used by people that are working in the system. Hmm. Okay. I'm certainly willing to support that. It seems like a reasonable thing to do, to have someone that knows what they're doing. Great. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there others to speak on the amendment? The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the member's motivation in doing this. There's one challenge that I see with it, and that's that in some particular cases, in some types of reviews, you may want somebody with expertise in a different field conducting that review. For example, if there is an issue with medications, we may want a doctor, perhaps, or somebody with extensive experience heading up that review, and the same can be true for a variety of other challenges; for example, mental health challenges and the like. For that reason, although I appreciate what the member is trying to get at here, I don't think that limiting it to that will accomplish what we're seeking. I therefore oppose the amendment.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you rise?

Ms Notley: I did. I guess the concern that I have – and I understand the objective that the member is trying to achieve. However, it appears to me that what we're doing is that we are adding "or" at the end of clause (b) and adding

(c) an individual with demonstrable expertise in child intervention

as opposed to:

(a) an individual employed . . . or

(b) an individual to whom the director has delegated . . .

Presumably, it would be adding "and" at the end of clause (b) and then

(c) an individual with demonstrable expertise . . .

I'm not sure why we would allow for there to be a public-sector employee who perhaps up to now has been, you know, working in oil and gas suddenly reviewing these files or why we would have somebody being delegated by the government who doesn't actually have expertise in these areas and then having someone who has expertise being one option of three options, which is the way it reads right now in your amendment.

I like your objective because what you want to do is make sure that this person has some kind of demonstrable expertise in child intervention, but I would think that that would be the case regardless and that you would want that to be a criteria if they are a public-sector employee or if they are a delegate. In the way it's written right now, it almost implies that the first two categories might not be someone with a demonstrable expertise in child protection. So that would be why I would have some concerns about it. Maybe you could answer my question. Perhaps I'm interpreting it incorrectly or reading it incorrectly, or maybe you have a different objective.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from Edmonton-Strathcona and also the comments from the minister.

I actually was worried that perhaps the first two criteria could be somebody with no demonstrable expertise in child intervention. I know it would not be the intention of any ministry or any government official to put someone on there who maybe doesn't know the full scope, so that's why I didn't put it on as an "or." I put it on as a "must." They have to have "an individual with demonstrable expertise in child intervention." So I struck out the "or" and put it in there as "an individual with demonstrable expertise in child intervention." Everybody is shaking their head no at me, so I apologize.

Mr. Wilson: That's not how it reads.

Mrs. Towle: Okay. Fair enough. It's possible that I misinterpreted that, so I'll actually withdraw the amendment.

The Chair: Well, we'll probably have to vote on it. We'll just vote on it, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

4:50

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Mr. Chair, I'm a little bit confused on the intent of the amendment. If it is that at every step of the way we provide compassionate and caring and experienced and knowledgeable people, I recognize the intent, but it's an odd application of that in this clause, which might require that you would want, for example, to appoint a justice to review. You

might want to do that given the circumstances of a particular case. Finding a justice who had experience in child intervention might be a tall order, but if there were legal matters involved, a justice might be well suited for the position.

I get the intent that at every step of the way the children in the system and their best interests are always looked out for by people who have experience and who are caring and compassionate, all of those things, but in this particular case I can envision a case where you'd want a justice, for example, to be appointed to review. You're not appointing somebody to intervene; you're appointing somebody to review. It could be a legal matter.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, did you wish to speak?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just in addressing the concerns the Minister of Human Services brought up with regard to this amendment, I think that it allows for what you were referring to because it doesn't actually say "and" in the amendment. By adding (c), it wouldn't be: and requires demonstrable experience in the child intervention system. It's an "or." It just gives you a third option of an individual that could be designated as someone to review. I'm wondering if perhaps you could comment on that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I think we're getting a bit wrapped up in this one, because it's specifically general and generally specific. It's really saying that there's going to be a review, talks about that, and says that a director may, not "must," in writing, designate individuals. It does not name the number. It could be any number that the director wishes to put in place. It describes what they're supposed to be doing in an incident where there's a serious injury and then talks about: a designated individual must be in the public service or the director's delegated authority under section 121(3) or someone with direct child intervention.

The justice that the minister was talking about can easily be accomplished under 2(b). The individual that was being discussed by the minister of aboriginal affairs, you know, might be the person that's described under subsection (a). So none of these have to be the same person. They can all have different skills that they're bringing to the table. There is enough leeway there to solve having a diverse gathering of people under those designations. I think that if we take just a step back, we're still okay here.

Then the third section: "A designated individual must provide the director with a report of the designated individual's findings and recommendations, if any, arising from a review." You could have one or all of them or, I suppose, none of them doing the review. I think we're actually okay there.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yeah. Well, I think that ultimately one can go either way because in the way it's written, it doesn't preclude this person having demonstrable experience or expertise, nor does it require it. You know, it can adjust to the situation. Of course, the point that I would simply make is that this fabulous little internal review process continues to be internal and never sees the light of day, which, to go back to my central theme, is why on its own this doesn't deal with the larger issue around independence and transparency although it may assist somewhat in internal best-

practice management. But we continue to have a problem with that independence and that transparency.

That being said, the intent of the amendment is certainly a reasonable one, so we're happy to support it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A2.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do apologize. This is my first bill, so if I'm nervous – and I am nervous; I will admit that. I'm incredibly nervous, actually. It's such an important bill, and I can understand the passion of getting it right, so I apologize if I'm not always as articulate as I should be.

My second amendment is here, and I'll just pause for a moment while it gets distributed.

The Chair: We'll refer to this one as A3, hon. members.

You may proceed, hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment moves that in section 8 in the proposed section 105.771(3) we would add in "and the director must make the report public within 3 months" after subsection (1). Right now subsection (3) says, "A designated individual must provide the director with a report of the designated individual's findings and recommendations, if any, arising from a review under subsection (1)," which right now refers to an annual report. We would like to see the reports actually given quarterly rather than annually. We believe that this provides for more openness and transparency.

It also allows for anybody wanting to find out more information with regard to any of the reports or the recommendations to be able to do it in a three-month batch versus a year batch. If there are any issues or recommendations to maybe be followed up on or that need to be questioned or that they need to be held accountable on, it makes sure that that information is public a lot sooner and gives a clear motivation of appearing to be open and transparent.

We heard very clearly from people who are involved in the child care intervention system. A lot of them have expressed that sometimes by the time the information gets to them, a year later sometimes is too late to make changes. By providing the reports and the recommendations quarterly, it would allow the government to act sooner and also allow all of us on the other side to help them with that process and also bring to light systemic issues in a faster motion than what we've seen in the past.

I would appreciate the support of this House in having those reports reported on every three months rather than annually.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. I thank the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for bringing forward this amendment. I think this really, in many respects, highlights one of the points that our caucus has been making about the problems in this bill already, that although this may provide a bit of infrastructure for increased best practice within the ministry, it has not, as far as I can tell, ever been the intention of the government that the reports that are referred to in section 8 ever be made public. They're intended to be internal reports for internal practice review improvements, but they are not intended to be made public.

Moreover, quite honestly, even if they were made public, well, then what we would have done is that we would have created a parallel situation where we've now got reports and investigations being done by people who report to and through the minister at the same time that we've got an independent children's advocate, who we made an independent officer of the Legislature for the sole purpose of ensuring that they didn't have their investigations controlled by the minister's office. So then we end up with a parallel process.

5:00

This really gets to, as I said, the heart of our concern with this bill in that we've still not fixed the fact that only a small, small fraction of these fatalities or serious incidents or injuries are ever thoroughly investigated by someone who is (a) independent and (b) going to publicly report on the outcome of that investigation. We've got this lovely piece of legislation, but we will continue to be in this situation where roughly 20 per cent of fatalities are ever publicly reported on. In my view, that's not getting to what it is we need to do to truly develop the social and community consensus to make the changes that need to be made to prevent these kinds of injuries and fatalities in the future. That is why we think that, by all means, have these internal processes but understand them for what they are. They're internal processes designed to be best-practice promoters inside the ministry, but no one ever expects for them to be made public.

If your concern is about enhancing public accountability, transparency, social consensus, community consensus, then we need to go to a different platform. That is why our caucus has been saying that that platform has to be the children's advocate's office. Not only is that public, but it's also independent. It's really important that those two things go hand in hand, not just that the report is made public but that the report is written by someone who is truly independent.

Some members in the House may know this, but others may not because it was really fully discussed and clarified in the meeting of the Legislative Offices Committee last November when we talked about what it is the children's advocate is currently able to do. At that time we went over the numbers with him, and he told us that in 2012-2013 there were 20 cases that were reported to him and only four of those proceeded to a full investigative review. He indicated that based on his resources, what he has to do is that when a report is sent to him, he needs to come up with what he referred to as a differentiated response. In my view, that's sort of another way of saying triage. He went through, and he triaged and screened the cases to decide which ones of those would go to what he referred to as an initial assessment mode. He did that triage on the basis of a one-page document that was provided by the Chief Medical Examiner.

Just for the people that are following this debate, in the November 29, 2013, *Hansard* for the Leg. Offices Committee you'll find that discussion. He said that basically he gets a snapshot, a one-page document, from the Chief Medical Examiner, and then based on that, he triages and says: maybe in this case I'm going to do an initial assessment. Now, that initial assessment itself is not a full-blown investigation. He just gets a staff person to make a few more inquiries. After he's got the initial assessment, then he goes on to decide which one of those will be an investigation. In 2012-13, as I said, 4 of 20 were investigated.

The fact of the matter is that our position is that he is not being provided with adequate information up front to make that decision, nor is he being provided adequate resources to do all the investigations that we think he should do. That's why our position has been all along that he should just do all investigations at least

for a two- or three-year period, and at that point perhaps we can review whether that continues to be necessary.

That's where it should happen because that's the person we fought so hard to get in place, who is independent, who does not report to the minister, who does not report through the PAO, who does not have professional and political communications staff from the Premier's office massaging the timing and the process of the report release and/or content. That's why we needed to have it separate. That's where I think those kinds of reports should occur and those kinds of investigations should occur.

Right now 4 out of 20 ain't good enough. Four out of 20 is just not enough. What we've just done is that we've expanded his mandate, which is good news, but what that means now is that instead of 20, he's probably going to have 40. So then the question is: how does he decide which ones to investigate?

Ms Blakeman: That's limited by budget.

Ms Notley: The issue is both limited by budget as well as being limited by the nature of the information that he gets presented to him for his screening process. Although he is funded as a Leg. Offices person, he is governed by an act, one of which we are in the process of amending through this piece of legislation. We could amend this piece of legislation so that when it amends his legislation, which it's already doing, it tells him he has to do every report. Then the Leg. Offices Committee is compelled to give him the resources for him to fulfill his obligations under the statute. Anyway, that is our position all along.

All that being said, I absolutely respect and support the objectives that I think the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is trying to achieve through her amendment. My concern is that what she's trying to do, really, with all the greatest of intentions – she's taking a broken old car and kind of putting a new tire on it. In fact, we actually have a Cadillac over here, and if we just put gas in it, that'd probably be the best way to go instead of trying to fix this little tricycle over here. This remains the tricycle in this rather tortured analogy because it's not independent. It is still someone that works for the ministry.

That being said – and I've said this in second reading – absolutely, internally the ministry needs to clarify and solidify its own internal processes so that it meets its own goals and standards. It's not necessarily the case that you always do that by statute, but that's what appears to be happening here, and perhaps in this ministry that's necessary. I'm not opposed to this as an internal practice improvement strategy. It's just not the thing that's going to get us to the other piece, which is so necessary, which is independence and transparency. I hope that made some sense.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A3.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My next amendment has to do with section 16. I'll just wait until it's passed out.

The Chair: Okay. For the record, hon. members, this will be amendment A4.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and talk about amendment A4, where I would like to suggest that there be an amendment in section 16 in the proposed section 126.3(2) by striking out "ex parte." The current legislation says:

... may make an ex parte application in accordance with the regulations to the Court for an order that no person shall publish, in a manner that reveals that the deceased child received intervention services, the name or a photograph of the deceased child, of any parent or guardian of the deceased child or of any other individual identified in the order.

I completely understand the intent of this. The intent is to protect families who do not want to have their loved one's name or photo or anything like that made public and that they should have the ability to go to the courts and do that and not have to have a battle. I can share that same concern. However, my concern with this part of the legislation is that what we heard very clearly when all of this sort of went to the round-tables in January . . .

5:10

The Chair: Hon. members, if you could keep the side conversations down just a wee bit, it'd be much appreciated. Thank you.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: What we heard at the round-tables in January and, in particular, from the three young women who spoke – they talked about needing to have an identity, that they needed to have their voices heard and who they were known. There were a lot of conflicting statements in what they had to say. Two of the three girls wanted their names to be known in the event of their death, and even though they were children in care, they didn't want a publication ban. But the third child said that it should be up to her, and if she chose not to do that, then absolutely she shouldn't have to do that.

The problem with when you do it ex parte, the way that this is done, is that legislation is deciding ahead of time that only one part of the unit can go and do the ban. For example, a family member could go and say on behalf of a sibling of the deceased child: I don't want to do this. They can do it behind closed doors with a judge, and they can do it without anyone else ever knowing that they've done it until whatever time they want to release that information. I can understand, and I'm sympathetic to wanting to protect a sibling that has passed away.

Alternatively, though, what we also have is that you could have a situation where an outside member – in the same part of that it says that "a director" could make application, a "family member" could make application, or "with leave of the Court, any other person." So there could be a situation where, let's just say, there's a community that for whatever reason did not want the information that a child had died in their community, not to protect the family but just because they did not want the general public to know that a child had died or why, and they wanted a publication ban. They could actually make application to the court, with the family never knowing.

The family might never know that they have gone to court and created a publication ban. This leaves the family in a situation where the family doesn't know there's a publication ban, and the family or the siblings may actually want the public to know why or how their family member died. Because they never knew about the application for the ban in the first place because it was held ex parte, they never had the opportunity to say to the judge exactly why they would consider having a say in why the judge should consider why the ban shouldn't be granted.

What we're saying here is that there's obviously a role that the media would like to see as well so that they know when a ban is being applied for. My concern with the way it's set up right now is

that not only may the media or the public interest not be met because nobody knows the ban is happening, but there is an additional concern that the family member who the ban is actually applying to – their extended family may not even know what's happening. They may want their information public, or it could be the expressed wishes of the person who has died.

For example, if I have a child in care and that child passes away but has expressed wishes to me that they want their name to be known, an ex parte application says that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills could, of his own doing and for whatever reasons he may want to do that, go to the court and apply without my ever knowing and without my family ever knowing. He could apply to the court, get a publication ban, and you essentially revictimize the person who has died even though the child in care who has died has made it very, very clear that their wishes are to have their name known. So this is extremely concerning.

I totally understand the minister's idea in that by creating an ex parte environment, it puts less stress. The family might be grieving, and they may not want to go in there and give their case. What I'm suggesting with this amendment is: let's let the judge decide. Let's make sure that we're being fair on all levels and not just taking one side that actually could damage the family as much as it could damage the media or any other interested party. A judge will be fair, and a judge will decide what is in the best interest of the child's wishes. There's an opportunity for somebody who's impartial to say to them: "I understand why you want this. I understand the wishes of your child. Therefore, I will grant the ban," or "I will not grant the ban." But they will know all sides of the story.

In doing that, it's really, really important because we're not only protecting the child, who may want their wishes known, or the family, but we're also giving the appearance of being fair, open, and transparent, which is really, really important. This is a serious concern to families of children in care who want their information to be public, and I would suggest to everyone in here that there's additionally a serious area of concern that ex parte proceedings take away, sometimes, those freedoms that we enjoy every single day. I would hate to see a family member who wants their child's story to be told be sideswiped by an uninterested party, who's only doing it for gain or for protection or for whatever reason. I would hate to see that happen.

I would like to see the amendment be approved, that we take out the ex parte. The application process can still remain the same, but let's put it to the fairness of a judge and the court and allow an open and transparent process and not only protect the rights of the family as it pertains to when they want to make the application but also as it pertains to when they want to make their information public but other factors force them to not be able to. I would appreciate your support on amendment A4.

The Chair: Hon. minister, did you wish to speak to amendment A4?

Mr. Bhullar: Sure. Mr. Chair, I think that doing what the member says would put us in a position where, quite frankly, you could have a six-month process to hear something like this. If you have an order that has to be granted by application, then you're essentially saying that you have to have a trial almost. The way it is right now, a judge has the ability to make this decision based on two things, the best interests of any child receiving intervention services who's a sibling of the deceased child or the known wishes of the deceased child. I think that it's fairly confined.

I think that anyone other than a family member or a guardian that would want to bring forward an application would have to get leave from the court, first of all, prove a relation, a connection somehow or another, to the deceased child or to the family. For that reason, I think this would sort of serve the opposite purpose of what we're trying to achieve here. What we're trying to achieve is to say: "Let's open this up. Let's allow for publication." In those rare cases where it's in the best interests of surviving children, where they want a publication ban, that process needs to be able to take place sooner rather than later. That's why I'm against this amendment.

Ms Blakeman: This is where I wish I had a law degree because we're getting in kind of deep and specific on this. I'm wondering why the minister would think that it would take us an additional amount of time to do that.

I'm quite uneasy, and when I read the legislation, this was the part that leapt out at me first and the fastest, the fact that there could be – and it was now being enshrined in legislation – and ex parte application, which I have real problems with because it always means that it's not an open process. You know, only one party is going forward, and there's no legal obligation to notify other parties. If I'm misunderstanding this, I'm sure one of the many lawyers in here will leap to their feet and correct me. But only one person knows what's going on here, and that, to me, goes against the grain of what we're trying to achieve here. We're trying to have as open and as transparent a process as possible. We've got a situation where a child who's received intervention services has died. We can have a director, a family member, or, with leave of the court, any other person, which covers quite a bit, come and make an ex parte application. I think that should be taken out.

5:20

If we take it out, it says that with leave of the court any other person can make an application in accordance with the regulations for an order that no person shall publish, blah, blah, blah. The next section is that the court may grant an order applied for if they're satisfied it's appropriate for the best interests of the child who is a sibling or is the known wishes of the child. I don't see why all of that needs to be done ex parte. I'm not sure that the ex parte actually makes this a longer legal process.

So if any of the legal beagle minds that are here in the House could please get up and explain to me why this would make it a longer process, I'd love to hear it because I don't think that's necessarily true, and I'm quite uneasy about having the ex parte in here. I would further like to hear the minister talk about why he chose to make it ex parte. I'm throwing that one out there.

I have a legal beagle mind here, Mr. Chairperson, that legal beagle mind.

Ms Redford: I think that before I start, I have to say that the last time I stood in this House and answered a question related to Justice, I was probably sitting one row up, so I have the same perspective on the House.

But in trying to answer the question, I think that what I hear from the minister and from members on the opposite side is about trying to get the best and most thorough public and transparent process for this. My reading of the legislation, only my reading, would be that what that allows for is permission for an ex parte application to be made as opposed to only an ex parte application to be made.

My only perspective would be – and I'm sure other lawyers in the House might have an opinion on this – that when a lawyer

goes on behalf of any of those named and interested people to court to make an application on an ex parte basis, one of the first things that a judge does is to look at the legislation to determine, based on that criteria, whether or not it makes sense and will very often first ask the question of whether this should be an ex parte application and, in many cases, will say to a counsel bringing this forward on behalf of a party that in this case it shouldn't be an ex parte application.

So from my perspective it's not a restrictive clause that simply says that only an ex parte application will be made, but what it does say is that it's permissive, that an ex parte application can be made, which is different. Then in a public court – because all of these applications would be public unless counsel argued to a judge that they wouldn't be – they would then be able to make that application and would not be excluded from making that application.

Quite frankly, in practical terms, in some of the work that I've seen, I think that the intention in this is to put in place a system where you don't have people that are perhaps trying to play games with a really awful situation start going to court and saying: "Well, Mr. Justice, Madam Justice, you can't make an ex parte application. We want to be there." And then that does turn it into, through sort of legal procedure and court process, a process that may not be in the best interests of the child.

So it's more permissive than restrictive. That would be my reading of it. I don't know if the minister wants to comment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Elbow for providing some clarification. It's my understanding as well that it is "may," and you're absolutely right.

Here's my concern, though. Even if it is "may," taking out ex parte doesn't add six months to the process. The application can still be made, and the judge could take the criteria of any other person. So any other person could be somebody who has a public interest, somebody who could be working not in the best interest of the child and could go in and may make an ex parte application. The family of the deceased child may not ever know that that person made application under that provision, and that is where I become concerned.

I completely understand your interpretation of it. I think that it's logical, and I think that you're absolutely right in the sense that it's meant to make the system simpler, but by creating the ex parte, it still means that the family member may never be notified when that person makes an ex parte application, that their wishes might be gone against.

The minister also mentioned that one of the criteria is the best interest and the known wishes of the child. If it's an ex parte application and the person making the ex parte application never knew the known wishes of the child, it is possible that the ban could be approved never knowing the wishes of the child because there's no avenue to actually bring in a third-party person to say: what are the known wishes of the child?

I understand where you're going with it. I guess what I'm saying is that there is a possibility. I'll maybe put it into a different narrative, an example. Let's just say that there were a number of incidents in one community and those families in that community wanted the names of the family members to go public. However, a leader in that community decided: "Well, I'm going to apply for an ex parte application, which I may do under this provision. I don't have to do it. It's not the only provision, but I may do that because, in my opinion, it's in the best interests of the community to actually have a ban and not actually bring this information

forward." That person going to the ex parte application may not know the best wishes of the child, may not know the known wishes of the child, and therefore could be working against the very child of the family they were intending to try and protect.

I understand, too, and I agree that the judge would likely say: should this ex parte application happen or not happen? But you can create a lot of friction. If the judge doesn't know all of the factors in why an ex parte application is being applied for versus not applied for, there is a possibility that the judge may not know the known wishes of the child or the best interests of the family, and an application could be granted that totally goes against everything we're trying to achieve here.

With that, I'm open to hearing your comments. I wonder if there's any room for a difference in your opinion, but that's where I'm coming from.

Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Just a couple of quick comments here, Mr. Chair. Let's just go back to the clause. As the Member for Calgary-Elbow pointed out, it's permissive. It allows. It doesn't require an ex parte; it allows for it.

So if you go to the next clause:

- (3) The Court may grant an order . . . if the Court is satisfied that the order would be appropriate, having regard to
- (a) the best interests of any child . . . and
 - (b) the known wishes of the . . . child.

Obviously, the court is not going to grant anybody that comes off the street any order under this process because it's not going to be aligned with the best interests of the child. This is not available to somebody who's trolling for whatever reason. However, once granted, if an application is granted, it must be served. Right? So everybody is going to know about it. Once served, if you go to clause 4, it's never binding on a family member ever, and any person who has been served can make an application to have the order set aside. All these processes are in place.

So it's permissive, as the Member for Calgary-Elbow pointed out. It permits the ex parte application but restricts it to a careful set of circumstances, again all focused around the best interests of the child. I think 4(a) is particularly important here. It's never binding on a family member, granted or not.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Chair, some of the reasoning behind allowing for such a process is that things happen very rapidly. I met with a mother whose child had in fact passed away while in the system, and the mother told me stories about how people were trying to get information, pictures, et cetera, right while she was sort of at the hospital. If that mom says, "You know what? My child's story needs to be restricted," you need the ability to go and make this happen pretty quickly. It's that interest of protecting people's privacy when they want it to be that has me committed to this process. You know, this is a significant change in our law. This is a very significant change. As we were discussing earlier and as others have discussed, this is going to require some balance, and I think it does that.

5:30

Where that mom, whose child has just passed away, may need to get access to a decision pretty quickly, she has that ability using an ex parte process. She doesn't have to serve a series of people. When a stranger off the street wants to come in and ask for a publication ban, it's very clear in the legislation that there are two criteria, the known wishes as well as the best interests of other siblings receiving child intervention services. The court is not about to make a decision saying: I know nothing about X, but let

me grant this order to Stranger Joe off the street. I understand what you're saying. I think we can come up with a multitude, dozens and dozens, of different scenarios here that can play in each direction, but I think that this finds the best balanced solution for us to move forward right now.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Well, as I've been saying to several people that I'm discussing this with, I struggle a bit with this section because you can come up with a scenario on either side where some form of injustice might occur, which is sort of why in some ways I'd like a chance for us to have a longer and more thorough discussion about it and how to set up some protections for some of those scenarios.

One question I have. So when it's ex parte – let's say that you've got a child who's in care that is a victim of a fatality. I don't know the stats, Minister, but I would expect that at least 50 per cent of them have siblings in care. At least. I suspect you could probably give us that information. Probably at least 50 per cent, maybe more. Half of those kids have siblings in care. The way this is written right now is that that means, then, that the ministry goes off to court ex parte, makes the application on the basis of the fact that there are younger siblings in care. The question is: if it's ex parte, does anyone in the family get notice? I know we often think that the fight is between the ministry and the media, but on a day-to-day basis it's often other members of the family, or it could be. If it's ex parte, does it mean that the family gets notice? That's my first question. How do you define if anybody in the family gets notice? Who gets notice? That's a question I have. Or does ex parte mean that, no, it's the ministry just basically saying: "We know there are four other siblings in care. We're going. We're doing an ex parte. We're not engaging with the family at all on this?"

If that's the case, then what if the family has evidence about clause 2, the known wishes of the deceased child? How does the judge even consider that? Does the judge then actually have a hearing and bring in and compel witnesses? I don't think they do in an ex parte hearing. The question becomes: well, how do we know what the known wishes are? You've got two criteria there. The very people that can give evidence on criterion 2 are by definition often not getting notice of the hearing. I'm not saying that the government is doing this intentionally or with any malicious thought, but what I can see is that probably at least half of the kids in question here will have siblings in care, so it would be almost a pro forma policy that you would do the ex parte thing. Then we've talked previously about the fact: how many of those families are able to navigate an ex parte or non ex parte application? I'm not sure which.

I actually have a genuine question. Is the family given notice when that happens, and if not, how do we deal with the fact that they may have evidence on one of the two criteria that you're asking the judge to consider? I just think you may be also legislatively building in a conundrum there that the judge will struggle with. "You've got ex parte. You want me to consider this evidence. I don't know how to consider this evidence. It may be ex parte, but now I actually have to start subpoenaing witnesses because I need to satisfy myself about this evidence." What's that process look like?

Then, of course, the other piece of it is that an order doesn't bind the family member, but it does bind the family member from pursuing the publication of the information. As I said before, that means that that family member then has to go back into court. I'd always talked about the reverse onus. This is kind of a reverse

onus because it's ex parte. We've talked about how legally equipped the ministry is relative to many of the families they work with, that reverse onus when it's ex parte is not really a reverse onus because nobody is giving evidence from the other side. So that's a concern. When you have a reverse onus, presumably someone is on the other side arguing the other side. That's what I was trying to get at when I talked about the reverse onus process.

I appreciate what you're saying about the time limits. I know that the minute you get two parties to a legal dispute, you've got a time issue, and I know that sometimes you have to deal with these very quickly. I'm not saying that I've got the answer, once again, but I am saying that there are some concerns there that you're not really doing a reverse onus. You are asking the judge to consider evidence that you're not letting him have before him through the process that you're setting up.

A couple of observations there. Certainly, if you have information to provide us about what the role of the family is, that would be helpful.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. While the minister is looking things up, part of what I'm starting to wonder – what I'm not starting to wonder is why I have never been the critic for this portfolio. That I'm not wondering about. That's pretty clear to me right now. But I sort of have, aside from the rule of 500, a rule of 3 to 5 per cent. I'm wondering if the minister has numbers because we could be coming up with all kinds of scenarios that, yes, might possibly happen, but, you know, is this 1 child in 5,000? Is it appropriate to turn the world upside down for that? I'm just wondering how often this kind of thing is likely to be needed. You must have thought about that if you've put it in the legislation. I am a little concerned now that we're digging so deep that I'm wondering if we're changing the world for half a per cent. I mean, that might be valid. Sometimes you do that. But I am starting to wonder that. So if I could just add that little request for information onto my colleague . . .

Ms Notley: You're asking about the ex parte and how long does a session last?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, yeah. I do take the point that was made – I think it was Calgary-Elbow – that sometimes families can be awful to each other, particularly awful. Like, nobody is more insulting to you than your little brother, right? So sometimes families can be their own worst enemies, and they might be a big part of the problem with ex parte and trying to get in on things that they shouldn't be in on. Yeah. That's what my question is around generally. I'm kind of undecided about how I'm going to vote on this. I actually had included it in an amendment I was going to do, and now I've taken it out. So if you're able to answer that or if anybody is, I'd appreciate it.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, a lot of the questions I'm hearing and concerns I'm hearing seek very simple solutions. The fact is that when you look at who alone a family member is and how many different people can have touched a child's life, it can be incredibly complex in this particular area. I mean, if we want to start talking about who you need to serve before you do an application, a child could have been in care since birth – we have children that are in care since birth – and that child could have such significant medical issues because mom was

addicted to crack. These are stories you hear. As a result, that particular child may not have a great life expectancy.

5:40

So in that particular case, you know, if there are other siblings involved, how do you determine who you need to inform? How do you determine who needs to be there at the application? That's the challenge with this. But the fact is that for those who don't want their child's picture published, they need to be able to make an application in a short period of time. That's the issue here. What I heard very loud and clear at the round-table and since then is: treat us as you treat others. But if there is a child whose family is incredibly diverse and you have one person out of 10 who says, "Yes, I want to publish the picture" and you have nine others that say, "No; who are you going to serve for an application that's not ex parte?", how are you going to allow that process to happen before there is actual publication?

You know, we're looking at cases here where there is a death. The Member for Edmonton-Centre is asking for numbers. The numbers are far too much still. If you have five or 10 a year, that's five or 10 too many. If you have 15 or 20, that's still far too many. With respect to the number of children that pass away that have siblings in the system, I don't have a number handy, but a large proportion, I would say 30 to 40 per cent of kids who are in care, have other siblings in care. That's a rough number, 30 to 40 per cent.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I think I understand some of the questions coming forth, but we cannot anticipate for every eventuality with this particular piece, and I would rather side on the ability of a family to be able to bring forth a quick order before there is publication if that is their wish.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A4.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We will go back to the bill.

Speaking on the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. As I mentioned, I also have an amendment that I will pass to someone.

The Chair: This will be A5.

Ms Blakeman: A5?

The Chair: A5.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, wait a minute. I just sent you the wrong one, didn't I? Yeah. Sorry; can I get that back?

The Chair: Would you, please? Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry, Mr. Chair. Momentary brain freeze.

An Hon. Member: Momentary?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It's momentary. I'm having a bad day here. You just don't want to be getting me even crankier than I am because you wouldn't believe how long I can talk when I'm really cranky.

Sorry; that was my fault. I had an amendment that I had actually tried to change and got excited at that moment and leapt up and gave the old amendment, so there may or may not be a new one coming. What I was attempting to do is to add to the same section we're talking about. This will just make the poor minister . . .

The Chair: Hon. Member, you're just speaking? You don't have an amendment right now?

Ms Blakeman: No, not at this second, but, you know, I'm ever hopeful.

The Chair: Thank you. Hope springs eternal.

Ms Blakeman: But what I would like to do if I had an amendment would be that under that same section we've been talking about, which is on page 9 of the bill if you like the paper bill, otherwise it's under section 16 of the bill, which is amending section 126.3, and this comes in (3), so that we're in the same section – we're talking about the same thing. If a child receiving services has died,

- (a) a director,
- (b) a family member, or
- (c) with leave of the Court, any other person

[can] make an ex parte application . . . that no person [can] publish, [in any way] . . . the deceased [child's information].

Although, the court does have to take into consideration:

- (a) the best interests of [the] child . . . who is a sibling . . . and
- (b) the known wishes of the deceased child.

At this point I would then insert two clauses, one of which would say that the proceedings under the previous section would be closed to the general public but open to representatives of the press, radio, and television unless the court on an application is satisfied that such representatives being there would be manifestly harmful. Yeah, it's closing it to the public, but it would allow the media to be there. The media in many cases act as a watchdog on behalf of all of us. You know, they don't always need to publish, but they do need to, I think, be there to witness what's going on.

The second part of an amendment that I would do if I had an amendment, which I may well have today if things are looking up for me, would be to say that no report of a proceeding can disclose the names of any of the people that are involved in the proceeding as a witness, as a party, or disclose the identity of any such person. This is taking everything a step further than others have gone, but it is taken directly from the legislation that is in Manitoba. I basically just lifted those sections because I was quite persuaded, when I heard of it, that this was another way of ensuring a double check or an extra layer of transparency. So it does inject the electronic and other media into this situation, but it can also have them taken out, you know, if there's an application. It leaves it up to the judge and gives them the flexibility. They can't report and identify who's in the room.

Oh, my goodness. Thank you so much. It's my lucky day, Mr. Chairperson. I am going to send . . .

The Chair: An amendment.

Ms Blakeman: . . . an amendment to the table.

The Chair: Wonderful. It would become A5, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: It would be A5, actually. Thank you.

The Chair: It would be A5, absolutely.

Ms Blakeman: My thanks to all of the amazing people that help us MLAs try and get things done, which includes all the people at the table and the pages. I'll just pause for a moment and let you actually get your hands on this amendment so that you can see what I'm up to.

The Chair: I'm sure you could start, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Well, that's just encouraging, that everyone is paying such close attention.

As I was saying, these two clauses would be – I don't think you say "injected"; that's probably not the right language – placed . . .

An Hon. Member: Inserted.

Ms Blakeman: Inserted. Thank you.

. . . inserted almost at the end of this whole section about trying to get a publication ban in place, who can be there, whether it's ex parte, what decisions the judges can make, taking into consideration the siblings of a child who's died while in care, and the known wishes of the child. Then I'm trying to insert under there that the proceedings would

be closed to the general public but shall be open to representatives of the press, radio and television unless the court is satisfied that the presence of such representatives would be manifestly harmful to any person involved in the proceedings.

There's an out clause, but it says that otherwise the media are going to be in the room. If the judge is satisfied that's a problem, they can boot them.

Then, no report of that proceeding, of that ex parte application, can disclose the name of any of the people that are involved there. So you get away from, you know, describing family members or who's the representative of the department or any of that. Those names are all taken out of it. But it does allow the media to be in the room as an additional witness, and they would know, based on the outcome of that particular decision if it gets to that point, whether in fact there is a ban on the publication of the name of the child or not.

5:50

As I said, I took this from the Manitoba legislation pretty much word for word. That's what they use. I'm satisfied that it works in another jurisdiction, a jurisdiction that's fairly similar to ours in makeup and in diversity and number of kids in care.

I'd ask people to support this. I think it's a pretty good idea. I look forward to the discussion from everyone else. I do move amendment A5.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We have amendment A5 on the floor. Might I ask, hon. members, that you keep your side conversations a little lighter, please? Thank you.

Anyone else to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to rise and speak in support of this motion. I think it's important that we look to other provinces and see what their legislation has done. As the member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre has said, this is directly taken from the Manitoba legislation. I'm happy to see it put in here today.

This essentially says that it will be closed to the general public at the beginning, but it can be open to all representatives. It's not held ex parte. It leaves the ability for the judge to decide what is manifestly harmful to the person in the proceedings. It creates an open and transparent process. It allows for the judge to be the key objective person to decide who should and should not be there. It also allows the media to hear the context in which the argument is being made for the ban to happen, and should the ban be granted, they cannot report on it. It might go a long way – and I think it would go a long way – to educating a lot of people about what that process looks like, the process for how people make the decision to grant or go through an application for a ban.

It also says, "No report of a proceeding under subsection (2) shall disclose the name of any person involved in the proceedings as a party or a witness or disclose any information likely to identify any such person." That's really important because it allows for an open, transparent, fair process. It additionally goes on to say that the judge, who's objective and fair, will be the determining factor. Then over and above that it allows the people who are there, who are arguing for the ban or against the ban, to understand the whole picture as to why the person is making the application but also the impact of why the ban should or should not be covered.

I think it goes a long way. This is definitely a different way to do things, and I think the minister would be really moving us forward if he had the opportunity to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill.

Ms Notley: I guess I'm just sort of speaking generally because I don't have my amendments back, so I will just speak in the hope that we can reconvene in committee tomorrow afternoon.

We've had an interesting discussion and we will continue to have an interesting discussion about the issue of how we deal with a publication ban. Having discussions with the minister about maybe a different approach to it, where – it seems to me that just through the discussions that we've had already, we've had a lot of different scenarios that have been put forward. There may be some issues there with how this will ultimately be implemented. There are ways that we can deal with that. Obviously, the regulations are the mechanism through which the publication ban process and the ex parte process will be implemented, so perhaps there's an opportunity to allow for a process where we would have some form of all-party discussion before implementing the regulations, that would circumscribe the process through which the ex parte applications were made. That might be a way to go. I think that that's an important thing to consider, and we're certainly looking into that.

One of the other issues, as I said before, that I think we need to deal with in order to ensure that we really get the best out of this bill is to do a better job of outlining the responsibilities of the children's advocate. One of the things that happened when we first brought in the children's advocate legislation was that we lost the quarterly reports. It used to be that the children's advocate had to provide a quarterly report of who was contacting him, including mandatory notifications, and those had to be done every three months. They were given to the minister, and then the advocate also had to release them.

That provided information that was important because the mandatory notices are the notices under the act that, you know, teachers, doctors, neighbours, and people like that have to provide to the ministry where they think that there is a child that may be at risk. We used to get those every three months, and it was worth while to sort of see what the state of the world was. It was also good, I think, in terms of having people understand what it was that folks within the system were dealing with and trying to juggle and to manage. So when the children's advocate act was passed, making the advocate an officer of the Legislature, one of the

casualties of that process was the quarterly reporting. So I'm hoping that we'll be able to have some consideration later about reinjecting that into the mandate of the children's advocate.

We will be talking about that because I think that, again, we're continuing to move towards – in my view, the more we have an open, healthy discussion about the issues that face these vulnerable children, the more we're prepared as a society to do what's necessary to try and do right by those vulnerable children and their families. If you keep it quiet, everybody can just pretend everything is fine and just look the other way. If we have an open, healthy discussion about the many complex challenges which these children and their families face, not necessarily in an individualized, name-and-picture kind of way but just in a more generalized way, then I think we're in a better place to be able to, as I say, build that community consensus for the actions that need to be taken to really make a major difference.

That's why, in my mind, it's always about enhancing transparency, enhancing the opportunity for community discussion,

and, of course, ensuring that we do that in the most independent of ways.

Yes. We seem to be there.

Ms Blakeman: What about upstream things?

Ms Notley: Upstream things?

Ms Blakeman: Before we get to this point.

Ms Notley: Well, of course, we know and we've talked before about the fact that we're doing all of this discussion – and that's great – but at the end of the day, what we really need to be doing is moving forward on that unfortunate promise, that was ignored the minute it was . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but it is 6 o'clock, and the committee will stand adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 6, 2014

Issue 26e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 6, 2014

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, please be seated. We'll call the Committee of the Whole back to order.

Bill 11 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: I don't believe we have an amendment on the floor. We're on the bill.

I'll recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The other side of the House will be pleased to know that this is my last amendment, so I'll wait for it to be passed out.

The Chair: Hon. members, we'll call this amendment A6.
Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise tonight to speak to amendment A6. Amendment A6 is asking that an amendment be done to section 16 in the proposed section 126.3(3) by striking out "and" at the end of clause (a) and by adding "and" at the end of clause (b) and adding the following:

(c) the public interest in the administration of justice.

So what this actually means is that – right now under section 3, under the publication ban section,

(3) The Court may grant an order applied for under subsection

(2) if the Court is satisfied that the order would be appropriate, having regard to . . .

This goes back to when we were talking about the best interests of the child, the best known wishes of the child in that. Right now it says:

(a) the best interests of any child receiving intervention services who is a sibling of the deceased child, and

(b) the known wishes of the deceased child.

I'm asking that we amend it to include "the public interest in the administration of justice."

The reason for this amendment is that, yes, we need to know the best wishes of the family and any siblings. We also need to be aware of the known wishes of the deceased child, but there could be a public interest argument to be made, that the judge could consider, that might actually either be considered as much as or as a part of the discussion when they're considering the order.

This could happen for a multitude of reasons. Especially in an ex parte application, which we've already discussed here, there might be the opportunity for the judge to say, "No. That is not enough. We need to consider the public interest as a whole" and in doing that to order the ban or not grant the order for the ban on that. This would allow for other parties to attend the ex parte should they be notified of it or should they be given the opportunity, but it also broadens the scope under which the judge can make a decision to grant or ban the order. The judge has some discretion to look at the community, the culture, the province, and the whole factors that affect whether he or she is going to grant an order applied for under the subsection.

I would hope that the members in this House would be able to support this amendment, and I look forward to hearing the arguments.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is something that I feel that I can support. The public interest is something that the courts always consider. By having it in the legislation, I think it does us no harm, and it further solidifies the fact that each case needs to be looked at within the broader perspective of the public interest as well. So it's something that I do support.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks so much for this amendment. I think this was something that was identified in the last 10 days or so by a number of different bodies, including the media, in regard to the disclosure of information. I'm very happy to see that there is some, again, co-operation across the aisle. This is becoming a trend, somewhat disturbing but in a good way. I appreciate the essence of this amendment. I think the Alberta New Democrats were actually working on something like this as well, so certainly I can support this amendment. Let's get it done.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also want to congratulate the minister, you know, for accepting the amendment. Whenever the minister talks anywhere, he talks about the public interest, the public good. In the interest of the public I think it's good to accept this amendment. This will only strengthen the bill. I congratulate the minister for accepting the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A6.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:36 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Eggen	Kang
Anderson	Fawcett	Kubinec
Barnes	Fenske	Lemke
Bhardwaj	Fox	Leskiw
Bhullar	Fraser	Oberle
Bikman	Fritz	Redford
Brown	Goudreau	Rodney
Calahasen	Griffiths	Rowe
Campbell	Hale	Sandhu
Casey	Horne	Scott
Cusanelli	Hughes	Towle
Dallas	Jansen	Weadick
Dorward	Jeneroux	Woo-Paw
Drysdale	Johnson, L.	

Totals: For – 41 Against – 0

[Motion on amendment A6 carried unanimously]

The Chair: We're back to the bill, then, hon. members. Other speakers?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn debate and that when the committee rises, we report progress.

[Motion carried]

**Bill 12
Statutes Amendment Act, 2014**

The Chair: The committee has under consideration Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. Speaking to the bill? Question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

**Private Bills
Committee of the Whole**

**Bill Pr. 1
Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014**

The Chair: The hon. member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm proud to stand in Committee of the Whole on Bill Pr. 1, Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014. I'd just like to mention that it went through committee, and no amendments were suggested in committee. I believe we have no amendments. So I'd like to call the question.

7:50

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill Pr. 1? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

**Bill Pr. 2
Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014**

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do not believe there are any other comments to be made, so I move that the question be put.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are you ready for the question on Bill Pr. 2? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Chair. I'd ask for unanimous consent that we do third reading of Pr. 1 and Pr. 2.

The Chair: We have to rise and report. So you move that the committee rise and report?

Mr. Campbell: Okay. Rise and report first.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 12, Bill Pr. 1, Bill Pr. 2. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for the unanimous consent of the House that we deal with third reading of Pr. 1 and Pr. 2.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**Private Bills
Third Reading**

**Bill Pr. 1
Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014**

Mr. Hale: I would like to move third reading of Pr. 1.

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

**Bill Pr. 2
Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014**

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'd move Bill Pr. 2 for third reading.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little confused, but that's not abnormal. We've reported Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014, right? Progress?

The Deputy Speaker: That's correct.

Mr. Campbell: On Bill 12 we've passed Committee of the Whole? Okay. I guess we'll go to third reading on Bill 12. I need unanimous consent. We won't finish. If there are some speakers tonight that want to speak to it, we'll run off some speakers, and then we'll

finish it tomorrow so that people who aren't here have a chance to speak to third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 77 requires unanimous consent for two readings of a bill on the same sitting day.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 12 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. You know, I thank the Assembly for going through Committee of the Whole so quickly. I think that the amendments that we've brought forward are important amendments. I think that they meet the needs of everyday Albertans, and I would be quite anxious to hear other people's thoughts on third reading, and then I'll move third reading of Bill 12, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to have a few words on Bill 12, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. I guess that because this is such a collection of legislation, it required some attention here in the spring session. It moves everywhere from charitable fundraising to freehold minerals and the Societies Act and so forth. In sum, certainly, the Alberta New Democrats do support this bill.

I just have a couple of comments, though. First and foremost, always a word of caution in regard to building omnibus bills, okay? We've seen this as a trend in the States and now in the federal government, and I just really want to make sure we always have caution, that we don't build these giant bills that are just unwieldy, and it's difficult to sort out the good from the bad. Now, in this case these are statutes that are mostly innocuous, but, please, we're always on guard to ensure that we don't fall into that bad habit of building these giant omnibus bills that just clog up the legislative process and undermine it as well.

The two areas that I am most interested in in regard to this bill are, first, the section on the Health Information Act and then the section on regional health authorities as well. The information on the Health Information Act, I think, is very timely and important. We're getting this trend where more confidential information is being undermined or lost through electronic records. We had the case of that laptop being stolen from a medicentre. That's one of a long list of incidents like that, and we know that it will carry on until we make substantive changes to the way we handle electronic information.

8:00

This change to the Health Information Act is more of a response or a reaction after something has been stolen. I just want to once again reiterate the importance for us to unify our electronic health records and build a standard procedure that is followed by everyone regardless of whether it's a private or a nonprofit or a public entity dealing with health care. It's very important right now, and I think,

Mr. Speaker, it's a reflection and another caution that as we contract out more of our health system, our public health system, to private contractors, it exposes essential personal information to more and more hands that could potentially not treat it properly or even deal with it for nefarious purposes.

That's certainly an issue. Prevention is worth a pound of cure. But as we saw with the stolen laptop, you know, the lack of notification to the Health minister and other authorities in a timely manner frustrated all of us. I appreciated the Health minister's quick action and, actually, very firm action to precipitate some change in things. We just weren't being notified properly, he wasn't being notified properly, and I think we kind of shook that tree, and something better will happen in the future.

As I say, the prevention side is very important, the importance of a unified electronic health record protocol across the way to ensure that we have encryption at the very highest level all along the way. You know, once that happened, I checked with my own doctor at the Superstore, and he showed me his system. It was very good. It was entirely encrypted. But that was just on his own initiative. It wasn't because he was being told by AHS or by the government to do that. So the quicker we standardize encryption and protection, the better off we're all going to be.

Then the other area of this Bill 12 that I just wanted to make a quick comment on is in regard to changing the authority or increasing the authority of the Ministry and the Minister of Health on Alberta Health Services. Once again, I certainly do support this idea. I think it's time to call the long-standing experiment of Alberta Health Services what it was, which was a buffer by which government could impose health policy, and then if it didn't work out, they could blame a third party, which is Alberta Health Services. Clearly, it hasn't been working. It's been a very cumbersome and long and difficult journey since 2008.

I do not, Mr. Speaker, want to impose another upheaval in our health service. I think the workers have had enough of that kind of thing, of this continuous revolution of policy and so forth. Over time I think it's important for us to dissolve Alberta Health Services, to put more control back to the people on the ground who actually deliver public health care in this province, and to put the ultimate responsibility for both finance and global policy back in the ministry and in this Chamber, where it belongs. I can see that this might be a step in that direction. Over the fullness of time we need to make sure that we do that.

I think that the failed experiment of Alberta Health Services has served no practical purpose, really, except for a few things in regard to perhaps the centralization of certain services, the savings that were realized through the capacity to purchase on a provincial level, and so forth. In regard to the other levels of bureaucracy and the confusion that it's created, I think that it's time to call that.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the bill?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 12.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We'll adjourn the evening until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:05 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 7, 2014

Issue 26a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 7, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Hon. Members: Congratulations, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members, and my grandson Joshua Thomas thanks you.

Prayers

The Speaker: Now let us pray. In doing so, let us turn our attention to life itself, not only to our own lives but to the lives of those with whom we interact daily and others whom we represent as part of our elected duty in this Assembly. Through this prayer let us strengthen our resolve to help improve the lives of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Dr. Tuncay Babali, who is the ambassador of the Republic of Turkey. His Excellency is accompanied by Mr. Ali Riza Güney, who is the consul general of Turkey in Toronto, and Mr. Süleyman Candemir, Turkish commercial counsellor at the consulate general of Turkey in Toronto.

Alberta and the Republic of Turkey benefit from a strong trade and investment relationship. Ambassador Babali's visit is a great opportunity for us to explore new areas of co-operation in a variety of sectors, particularly in the areas of responsible energy development and agriculture. We are confident that the future will bring tremendous opportunities for our continued collaboration in trade and investment but also for cultural exchanges and other mutually beneficial partnerships.

Our esteemed guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of young individuals from my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Accompanied by some parents and teachers from one of my favourite schools, the Barrhead elementary school, is a group of remarkable and bright young students. Our teachers today are Mr. Brent Wierenga, Mr. Dale Erickson, Mr. Laurin Lamothe, Miss Chrissie Epp, Miss Muriel Laffitte along with teacher aides Rita Van Roodselaar, who is a friend, Denise Degner, and Anita Sloat. We have helper Miss Jazmin Chilito.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take the opportunity to introduce a very special young lady to the group, Olivia Walker. Olivia, could you stand? She is here today to visit the Legislature,

and I am so proud to introduce her. She is the granddaughter of my constituency manager, Audrey Neuman. Oddly enough to my colleagues and myself, she has taken an interest in politics and may one day aspire to be a politician.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I would ask all the students to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to this august Legislature St. Anthony's school from my diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. They are here today under the charge of Ms Michelle Fournier, who is also accompanied by eight local parents and 26 of the best and brightest students from St. Anthony's school in Drumheller. I would like them to please rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Alberta Chamber.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other important guests, starting with the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce Alberta's chief medical officer of health, Dr. James Talbot. Dr. Talbot attended the medical school at the University of Toronto in 1981 and had the wisdom to return to this great province just 10 years later. Dr. Talbot is an exceptional ambassador for the medical profession, with the distinct privilege of protecting the health of Albertans whom he has never even met. He does great work, and I encourage all members to read his recent letter to the editor commemorating Immunization Awareness Week. Jim is an invaluable advocate for wellness and an active member of his community, volunteering the precious little spare time he has to coach hockey and soccer. Dr. Talbot and I launched Canada's only comprehensive strategic approach to wellness recently, and together we will be kicking off a wellness engagement and action plan soon. We are incredibly fortunate to have Dr. Talbot serving the people of Alberta. I would ask that he now please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce an intrepid young Albertan, Brian Senio, who began his career in government as a caucus researcher in 2012 after receiving his undergraduate degree in political economy at Concordia University College of Alberta. Last year he became the special assistant to the Health minister and hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and this past December he became my executive assistant. Born and raised in Edmonton, Brian is a very proud Albertan, who brings a blue-collar work ethic to the office every day. He's embraced an active lifestyle since his childhood, growing up playing football and hockey. He's also an avid outdoorsman, who likes to fish and camp every weekend he can during the summer. He's the ultimate team player, and I'm very happy to have him as my right-hand man in Wellness. I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me now in giving Brian the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you the most important person in my life, my wife, Kärin Olson. [applause] I think they have some appreciation for what she has to put up with. She's the mother of our two grown boys and grandmother to our young grandson, she's a professor of

nursing at the University of Alberta, and she has always supported me in my career. She has knocked on thousands of doors in nine campaigns, and she believed enough in me to let me quit my job as a transit operator in order to run for Edmonton city council. She took a real chance, but it paid off. I couldn't have done what I have without her. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Welcome, and thank you for sharing.

The hon. Minister of Health, followed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly Dr. Barry Bultz, president of the International Psycho-Oncology Society, and Dan Brennan, who sits on the board of the society. They are both seated in the members' gallery.

Dr. Bultz and Mr. Brennan are here today to mark mental health awareness week and, as well, to draw attention to the work of the International Psycho-Oncology Society. The society is committed to integrating the practice of psycho-oncology into mainstream cancer care and creating international awareness of a made-in-Alberta innovation called the sixth vital sign. This is a tool used to measure the emotional distress of cancer patients. To date, 75 influential societies and organizations around the world have endorsed emotional distress as the sixth vital sign after temperature, pulse, blood pressure, respiratory rate, and pain. As we are all much too aware, Mr. Speaker, cancer takes the lives of many Albertans. It's a significant emotional and financial burden for them and for our province.

I'm very proud to have both gentlemen in the House today. I'd ask them to rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly today Kourtney Pratt, who is just joining my office now, with the student ministerial intern program here at the Legislature. I'm particularly proud of this recent acquisition of Kourtney because she is from my constituency. She grew up in Camrose. She attended the University of Calgary and has a degree, interestingly, in political science and dance. Maybe she can teach me some moves. I don't know. She's already had some very interesting experiences in her young career. She has been an intern with a public consultation organization in Toronto, and she's also been an intern at the embassy of Canada in Washington, DC. She's going to be attending law school in the fall. She's seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Lori Feist. Lori owns Seanaa Services Ltd., a company which helps other companies fill vacancies for skilled labour. She finds the right person for the right job and, in doing so, helps keep our economy running and improves the lives of Albertans who want meaningful employment. Lori does this

admirably. She's a member of the West Edmonton Business Association and lives in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. I would ask Lori to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly another constituent, Hector Marois, who is accompanied by his lovely wife, Jean, and their family. Last week Hector received the Governor General's caring Canadian award. Hector has volunteered over 15,000 hours over 26 years for unit 9Y, a short-term palliative care unit at the Covenant Health Edmonton General continuing care centre. He helps distribute breakfast trays and feeds patients who are suffering. He takes on the orientation of newly arrived families and patients. He helps educate them as to the services available to them, and at Christmas he and his lovely wife, Jean, are Mr. and Mrs. Claus to the whole hospital. In the summer he takes a two-week break to serve as a volunteer director at a camp for senior citizens. Hector is an amazing man and a model for all of us. I would ask Hector, his wife, Jean, and all of his family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, all members of this House know that this week is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, and it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an occupational health and safety team working to make Alberta workplaces safe and healthy for all of us. With us today, sitting in the galleries, are Ann Laing, Emma Boyd, Stephanie Morrison, Lewinda Knowles, Habiba Mohamad, Celia Chiang, Lisa Ross-Rodriguez, Gene Ozon, Matthew Rogerson, and from MacEwan University's public relations program, working right now in the ministry for her practicum, Allison Bignell. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Eight more introductions, so let's keep it moving, folks.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my intern, Eric Wagner, who is joining us here this summer. Eric is enrolled at the University of Calgary in the bachelor of commerce program. I'm really looking forward to Eric joining our team in the office. I'd ask Eric to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people who I'm pleased to know, Chelsea Hawrelak, originally from Camrose, now from Edmonton, as well as Sergeant Vickey Hulm. This week marks Missing Persons Week, and Chelsea is a victims support worker with the Kare unit, an investigational unit with the RCMP that focuses on the deaths of high-risk missing persons from all parts of Alberta and the Territories. Sergeant Hulm is the sergeant for missing persons within Kare. The Kare unit investigates all leads and assists in the capture and prosecution of the people responsible for these crimes. Chelsea has been nominated to receive a community justice award for community mobilization thanks to her dedicated efforts. She also works with the Kare proactive team to register sex workers and their involvement in high-risk lifestyles. Additionally, she

works closely with the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation, and Métis child and family services.

I had the opportunity to meet with both of them earlier today to talk about the important work the Kare unit does for missing persons and the support that they provide to all victims. I'd ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Your guests are not here?

Let's go on with Lacombe-Ponoka, then.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ann Craft. Ann is a well-respected and very successful real estate agent in central Alberta who has been practising her craft for 19 years and is very proficient at her craft, hence her name. She is here today for answers to why sour crude produced water was allowed to be delivered to her property instead of potable water. Ann, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have an additional introduction of two individuals seated in the public gallery, my principal secretary, Adrienne King, and my executive assistant, Amy Lambe. Their good humour and lots of patience and strong organizational backgrounds have managed to keep me mostly on task and focused most of the time. I appreciate very much the work that they have done for me in the last year or two. I would like the Assembly to recognize them. If they'd please stand and receive the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Stephen Vincent. Stephen is joining our office through the summer internship program. In just the few days he's been here, I can tell that he's a huge asset to our office. Now, Steve is just beginning his poli-sci degree, but he has a long career as a musician, even playing with rock legend Jon Bon Jovi. On a more personal note, though, I'd like to thank Steve because he played at the fundraising event in 2011 for the Slave Lake disaster, and he did a great job helping to raise funds.

He's accompanied by Kathleen Range, who is my press secretary, Mr. Speaker, who was there through the floods last summer, that devastated so many people in so many communities. She was there every moment, sacrificing her family time in order to help Albertans. Like so many public servants, she continued to sacrifice and serve Albertans, especially in their time of need. On behalf of Albertans I'd like to thank you for that, Kathleen.

I'd ask both of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Airdrie and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the

Legislative Assembly Ms Huguette Hébert, her daughter Anita Rudichuk, and Shauna McHarg. All three of these people represent families who've been banned from facilities while they advocate for their loved ones in continuing care and long-term care. They're here today hoping to get a meeting with the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Seniors. They're hoping to bring awareness to a serious issue facing many Alberta families.

1:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to rise today on behalf of my dear friend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and her wonderful husband, Gord. Gord is a long-time member of the Calgary Millennium Rotary Club. Calgary Millennium does an incredible job of impacting lives in the community, and today I have the pleasure of introducing one of those lives that has been impacted. Doris Weidling is a youth exchange student from Hamburg, Germany. She arrived in Canada last August and will head home later this summer. During her exchange she has visited many great locations around Alberta. She is an accomplished seamstress. She is very excited to participate in her school graduation, and at that grad she will unveil a dress that she has made by herself. She is a true ambassador of goodwill and the Rotary spirit. All of this would not be possible without the dedication of Rotarians, and to them I say thank you. Today Doris is joined by Rotarian Heather Anderson Cortis, who some of you may remember from her years of service on staff here at the Assembly. I'd ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests, Keith Purdy and Richard Kennedy. Keith and Richard are here today to observe the long-overdue amendments being made to the Marriage Act of Alberta. They both have a long history of fighting for marriage equality in this province. In early 2000 Keith and Richard were part of the human rights campaign to have same-sex couples declared families in the eyes of the health care system. During the Klein years they fought in co-operation with Egale Canada against the use of the notwithstanding clause, and only 30 days after the law changed, they married in 2005. I'd now ask Keith and Richard to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That concludes the list I have, but if there are others, let's tidy them up right now as well. No more introductions?

Tribute to the Hon. Brian Mason Leader of the New Democratic Opposition

The Speaker: Hon. members, you'll notice by the clock that I have taken some liberties today with the schedule. In fact, this section would be reserved for ministerial statements. There are no ministerial statements today. However, based on precedent in this House, this would be the appropriate time for us to do something else that is rather unique and very special. As you know, notice has been requested so that at this time we might pay tribute from each of the caucuses, and perhaps others who might wish to join in, to one member who is retiring as an hon. leader of a particular caucus and a particular party in this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has announced that he is resigning as leader of the New Democrat opposition effective October 19, 2014. That means that when the House normally is scheduled to convene, which would be the last Monday of October, he would return not as the leader. So this may be one of his final days as leader, and the House has indicated a desire to rise and pay tribute to him.

Before doing so, I would like to personally say thank you for 10 – dare I say it? – outstanding years of service on behalf of your constituents, hon. member. Thank you for the passion and the humour that you have brought. I wish as Speaker I could have allowed more of it to surface. However, we'll see how that goes.

Let us begin our brief tributes. Let me call upon the hon. Premier of our province to begin.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must say that it's with a great deal of pleasure that we honour not only the service of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood as a member of the House but particularly today as the leader of the New Democrat opposition. As well, it's with a great deal of pleasure that he's announced his retirement because he is a very effective leader in this House, and he has served very, very well. Now, of course, I'm being facetious when I say that we should celebrate his retirement from that position because in essence it makes the House work really well when you have good leadership on all sides. I would say that the service of the hon. member has been such that he has helped this House work really well during his term of leadership.

One of the things that the hon. member, I think, understands better than many is that you can have disagreement with respect to policy, you can have intensity in your discussion, but you can do it in a very respectful, most of the time, and intense way, and you can still be friends in doing it. I would like to say – and I hope he nods when I say it – that I have had the privilege of being his friend since our university days. People have heard the stories about how he got cheap rent in our fraternity house. Always one looking for a bargain.

I must say that we have over the years had the opportunity to spar on public policy issues and on strategies and process. I used to tease him about being a Communist, and he used to react appropriately. He said nasty things about me as well, but we always did it in good humour. I think I can recall in university, when we ran campaigns or at least worked on campaigns, him campaigning in favour of the National Union of Students and me leading the campaign against the National Union of Students at the University of Alberta campus. That privilege of being on the opposite side of intense and important debates has been extant ever since.

The hon. member has brought wit and humour to debate. He has been able to take the intensity of debate and soften it with a good jab, a good comment, something that brings a little levity to it, and that has always enhanced our debates. So, Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of privilege that I have the opportunity on behalf of our caucus to say thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the service that he has provided to Albertans and to this House.

I would be remiss if I didn't also say thank you to Karin. I think the reaction of the House was evident in terms of that we know just exactly how much she has put up with over the years. I'm not so sure that for some of those doors she was knocking on that she wasn't actually looking for him to try to drag him home. I'm not sure that she would agree that he actually improved their quality of life by getting a job in politics as opposed to what he could have earned in his previous job.

Nonetheless, the whole family – because family is important in this job, and all of us in this House know what a sacrifice it is for our families. We choose to put ourselves in the public eye, and sometimes that's not as pleasant as it might be, but it's our families who wear it. It's our families who feel it. It's our families who hurt when the arrows are cast, and they don't often get the good parts of it, the satisfaction of knowing when we've moved something, when we've accomplished something. But they do get the comments. They do read the papers. They do hear the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” I do think that in saying thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the contribution he's made, it is quite appropriate to acknowledge and say thank you to his whole family – his wife and his two sons and his extended family – because a commitment from a leader is a commitment from the whole family. It's a commitment which makes this province better and has made this province better.

I guess the only sad note is that he will still be bringing his humour to the debates in the House; he will still be annoying us with his persistent comments. But on the positive side he will still be adding to the quality of debate, the quality of public policy in this province, and the quality of life in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tremendously honoured to stand up on behalf of the Official Opposition this afternoon to honour my friend and colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Just to give you an idea of how well liked he is on our side, I had to arm-wrestle the Member for Airdrie and the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for the privilege of giving this speech today.

Mr. Speaker, the member's service to his party, his constituents, and his province has been truly exemplary. His leadership was always a reminder to me that politics is about people, standing up for people who otherwise wouldn't have a voice. He can leave his position as leader of the NDP knowing that his hard work, his courage, and his tireless advocacy has made a real difference in the lives of many Albertans, and I know he will take great pride in that.

Travelling the province with a person has a way of forging a bond, Mr. Speaker, and that's exactly what he and I did last fall. Throughout September and October we debated each other at postsecondary campuses around the province. There were no holds barred. I talked about climate change and poverty, he talked about oil sands development and lowering taxes, and I loved every minute of it. The response we got was tremendous, to the point that we had to add debates at the request of other campuses and actually had to turn down some other requests because we were just too busy. During our debates I got to see what has endeared him to Albertans over the course of his distinguished career: a depth of knowledge, quick humour, and an unwavering commitment to his principles and his constituents.

2:00

Oftentimes I'd get strategic with him, and I'd grill him about being too hard on us. I tried to reason with him that by attacking us too hard, it simply drives more votes to the Progressive Conservatives. His reply was always the same: if you're wrong on something, you're going to hear it from me.

The member was also something of a mentor – some might say a sergeant; others might say a sensei – for my colleagues new to the cut and thrust of being the opposition in the Legislature. I would be remiss if I didn't thank him on behalf of the members

for Airdrie and Calgary-Fish Creek for his assistance and support on their decision to cross the floor to the opposition benches. As new opposition MLAs I know that they valued his perspective and his advice on adjusting to their new roles.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sad the hon. member will no longer lead the NDP, I'm sad I won't see him on the campaign trail, but I am incredibly grateful for the time that he has graciously given me and for the friendship we have developed.

From all your supporters in the Wildrose Official Opposition, all the best, Brian.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus it is a pleasure to rise to recognize and honour the departure from leadership of my eminent colleague of nine years from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Though still a young man at 60, he's a man of no little wisdom, as I've discovered sitting just to the right of him in the Legislature. He has a broad and deep knowledge of both progressive public policy and the human psyche, and he continues to champion the interests of working people.

I liked this man so much that I tried as Leader of the Official Opposition to work with him. He spurned me, and we are still friends. Known by many in the House as the fastest lip in the Leg., he has distinguished himself beyond his satirical quips as a substantive and effective critic of government hyperbole and hypocrisy. Nor is he averse to colourful shots across the bow, as the hon. Speaker frequently chides us all for. His oft-repeated quip after opening prayer in the House is, "God save the government," a distinguishing feature, as is his unapologetic adherence to his party principles and positions.

To be fair, Brian has also occasionally stepped beyond his comfort zone to co-operate with the Alberta Liberals on common goals. Not only is he effective in debate and repartee in question period; much to my envy, he was an early adopter of the new technology, now old, called Facebook and Twitter. No doubt he's now into the nether reaches of Tumblr, Snapchat, and Vine, whatever they are.

For 25 years he has represented the people of Edmonton either at the city or provincial level and has gained the respect of colleagues across the political spectrum, his faithful constituents, and possibly even some from the union movement. Political rivalries aside, this is a man of principle, deeply committed to social justice. He has made and I have no doubt will continue to make extraordinary contributions to the public interest long term. It has been my privilege along with my Liberal colleagues to work with and learn from his leadership.

On behalf of this caucus our best wishes, Brian, in your next roles, and may your voice and values continue to sting those who do not hold fast to the long-term public interest of this great province and its people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Noting the time, I've received notes from the members for Calgary-Varsity, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and Calgary-Foothills, who wish to extend their particular kudos to you in writing to you personally, sir. They will be doing that immediately.

In the meantime let us conclude this round, unless there's anyone else with a burning passion to speak, by inviting the hon. leader of the . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: In conclusion, as I was saying, I would now invite the hon. leader of the New Democratic opposition to make his comments in response.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I thought you were moving right on to question period.

I did want to thank all members of the House and yourself as well as our table officers and the pages for a wonderful association, which is going to continue for at least a couple of years. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as leader of Alberta's NDP and to make so many wonderful friendships across the aisle. I'd like to thank my caucus as well for their wonderful support.

Now, when I left city council to run for this position as an MLA, some of the most enthusiastic backers were my opponents on city council. The mayor was so excited that I was going on to provincial politics, and I get a little sense of that from the Premier as well.

I would like to thank the Premier. We have had a long friendship, going back to our university days, Mr. Speaker. I remember the frat house that I boarded in. You know, I was considerably less moderate in my university days than I am today, I might say, as probably were the Premier and some of his cohorts. But I was invited to move in, and I did because it was affordable for me. Then I discovered, to my horror, that it was the Tory frat on campus and that I was the after-dinner entertainment. It certainly helped prepare me for this place as well. I would like to thank the Premier, and I'm very pleased that he has the opportunity to be the Premier even if it is just for a few months. I think that that is a wonderful opportunity for him, and I congratulate him very much on that and thank him for his kind words.

Now, the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has, as she said, become a good friend, and we did, I think, enjoy ourselves immensely on the eight debates that we had around the province at different campuses. Not to be immodest, but of the eight, I managed to win five, one was a draw, and she won two. So if anyone would like some tips on debating the Leader of the Opposition in the next election, you know, for a fee we could talk about it. She's been a very effective leader.

I did enjoy helping some of the people who crossed the floor to the opposition, who had been cabinet ministers, to survive without servants. They had to do everything for themselves. I know it was quite a shock, but they seem to have adjusted very well.

To the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View: I appreciate very much your words as well. I think that with respect to your offer to co-operate, it was more like a merger or a joining of some kind, so it's nothing personal, as you know. But I am pleased that our working relationship with the Liberals has improved considerably . . .

Dr. Swann: Since I left.

Mr. Mason: Well, you're not trying to take us over anymore.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is a man of great principle, and that was evident in his public statements and actions before he ever got into politics. I did go and see him, before he ran as an MLA, to try and persuade him to run in the New Democratic Party, and unfortunately Kevin Taft had beaten me to his house by about two weeks. I regret that, but I appreciate very much the chance that we've had to work together, and we'll continue.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be around for at least two more years as an MLA if the government sticks to its law on election timing.

We don't know. I'll have lots of opportunities to interact with people and to continue my friendship and my work on behalf of my constituents. I want to thank the entire House for this day. I do very much appreciate it. [Standing ovation]

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Thank you, all, for participating. I'd just bring to your attention that another hon. member of this House, who was the leader of the government caucus, will be recognized at a mutually agreeable time in the not-too-distant future, just so that you're aware. Thank you for the notes regarding that particular question.

Let us move on.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: You are reminded that you have 35 seconds for a question and 35 seconds for an answer.

Let us start with the first official question from the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Premier's Office Expense Oversight

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, today in Public Accounts we were treated to quite a spectacle. The Deputy Minister of Executive Council was reporting on the processes for overseeing expenses in the Premier's department. It turns out there aren't any. This deputy minister is the top bureaucrat in government, the head of the committee of all deputy ministers, and the top adviser to the Premier. Basically, he told us that the rules don't apply to the Premier's office. He certainly wasn't going to be the one to tell the Premier that a suggested course of action might break the rules. Does the Premier believe this is how the province should be run?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier is the head of that particular office and needs to be responsible for the expenses that are incurred in that particular office, just as a minister is responsible for the expenses that are incurred in a minister's office. The Deputy Minister of Executive Council is, in essence, the head civil servant and is not responsible for the minister's expenses or the Premier's expenses in that particular office. Having said that, I think, you know, it's not particularly appropriate for me to comment on what may have been said at a committee meeting this morning that I was not at and have not been privy to.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we asked the deputy minister about hiring and severance policies for senior people both within his department and across the government. There is no willingness to enforce rules or set a high standard from the top. What is clear is that the top bureaucrats aren't going to cross the Premier and the cabinet when they break the rules on all sorts of issues like hiring staff, travelling first class, or building a sky palace. Why is it that this Premier and this government won't even follow the rules that they themselves created?

Mr. Hancock: This Premier and this government very definitely will follow the rules that they've created. This Premier and this government are looking at the whole issue of severance policy and salaries, and we will be examining that and coming out with a very definite severance policy and salary policy with respect to political staff. We have already referred and the previous Premier referred the issue of expense policy to the Auditor General to review our travel and expense policy, using the Premier's office as an example with respect to how you investigate it. So we are

looking at ensuring how we can do a better job of adhering to the policies and making sure that we have the right policies.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we know that government and cabinet rules weren't followed when it came to hiring the Premier's chief of staff and communications advisers. They weren't followed when it came to booking first-class flights for the Premier and ministers or for using government airplanes. They certainly weren't followed when the last Premier ordered new furniture on the same day that the Finance minister said that we should all tighten our belts. Will the Premier at least admit that he owes Albertans many, many, many more apologies?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday I made a speech to about 1,300 Albertans and through them to every Albertan, at which time I said that we will do a much, much better job of adhering to the policies and processes that we have in place and reviewing them to make sure that we have the right policies and processes in place. It's absolutely important for Albertans, as we look forward to try and develop the policies, to try and do the things that are necessary to create a place for our grandchildren, and to have the kind of Alberta that we want with the quality of life that we want, the kind of quality of life that's attracting thousands of people to this province, that we take care of the things that help build and maintain the trust that we need to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second main set of questions.

Government Communications

Ms Smith: Yesterday I referred to a company called Navigator in two of my questions. Now, Navigator is a friend of the governing party and of Premiers past, present, and future. They're currently running the presumptive leadership campaign of Jim Prentice. They ran the last Premier's election campaign. Yesterday this Premier said that Navigator got a rich, untendered, sole-sourced flood contract because of unique skills. To the Premier: what unique skills did Navigator bring to the government that weren't available among the 200-odd very highly paid communication specialists that they already employ?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as is her wont, the hon. member chooses one half of the answer rather than the other half. What I said is that when you sole source under government policy, it's either because of an emergency situation or unique skills. The flood, of course, was an emergency situation, which anybody ought to have been able to determine. In an emergency situation, where you need to get all hands on deck and assemble your team of people immediately, you go to people that you know and you trust who have a reputation for doing the job. I wasn't part of sole sourcing that contract, but I presume that those were the types of things that went into that kind of a decision at that time.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they have 200 people working in their communications department. What is their job?

The former Infrastructure minister just said today that he wouldn't hire anyone who works on his campaign if he becomes Premier. What a great idea because Navigator never seems to have trouble landing contracts to give advice to this government. Senior political staffers move back and forth between Navigator, the government, and the PC Party all the time, but when you peruse the list of government employees, you find communications advisers, policy advisers, and executive advisers. Why does this government have to keep hiring Navigator?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as particular ministers or ministries address issues of importance to Albertans, I would believe that they would seek out the people that they need to do the best job possible. In an emergency situation sometimes you don't have the luxury of putting out an RFP and having a three-month process. So you might go to people that have a reputation in the area for issues management, have the skill sets and are known to have the skill sets, have a reputation in the community, and you might hire them in an emergent situation. I would assume that that's the circumstance under which Navigator was hired with respect to response to the floods.

Ms Smith: Great to have friends in high places, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Human Services minister credited Navigator with helping him put together his children at risk symposium, although members of the media commented about how poorly run that event was. The Human Services ministry has 25 communications people. They have dozens of people with "policy" or "adviser" in their title. They even had someone whose title was: team lead for organizational storytelling. With all of these advisers, spinners, and storytellers why do they keep hiring Navigator?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, Human Services, I know from experience, is a very large department with a lot of issues at hand, a lot of issues to be taken care of on a day-to-day basis, a lot of communication actually that has to be done. When you talk about communications people in a department, they're not all sitting around waiting for another event to happen. They are actually engaged on a day-to-day basis in making sure that Albertans have the information that they need to live their lives, to access government programs, to do what is necessary as a result of the circumstances that they find themselves in. There are a lot of people employed by this government to serve Albertans, and sometimes you need a few more.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third and final set of questions. The hon. leader.

Disaster Recovery Program Administration

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked some questions about the disaster recovery program, and the Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs made some startling comments. He said that LandLink had done a good job. Now, I can tell you that there are thousands of Albertans whose eyebrows went up when he said that. He is the minister responsible for the disaster recovery program. He has to know that Albertans are despairing at the conduct of LandLink. Does he really believe that they've done a good job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, last June the largest event that ever hit Canada happened, and we were all overwhelmed. So was LandLink. They had a small staff to help us through disaster relief, and they helped us to staff up to deal with this. They did the very best that they could under some very trying situations. We moved very quickly to support people in this province, and LandLink has helped. It hasn't all been smooth, but we've all worked together to meet the needs of Albertans.

2:20

Ms Smith: While the Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs was shockingly singing the praises of LandLink, he also admitted, and

he just did again, that they weren't ready for a major flood. Mr. Speaker, LandLink has had the contract for managing disaster relief programs since 1995. The fact that they had no plan for a major flood is nothing to make excuses about. LandLink has received millions and millions for mismanaging disaster programs, at least \$18 million in this event so far. If they weren't responsible for having a plan on how to handle a major crisis, who was responsible?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very talented group at the Alberta Emergency Management Agency that does work not only with LandLink but with our municipalities and our communities in any disaster. Whether it's the Slave Lake fires or whether it's a flood, we move and work with our municipalities, with our other partners. LandLink was a part of that process that helped us to deliver those DRP processes during those events, small floods, small events. We've never had anything like this in the past. It was a huge undertaking, with 10,000 homes impacted, and we've done a great job with it.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, these comments are particularly concerning because they appear to suggest a change in attitude on the part of government towards LandLink. The last Municipal Affairs minister made it clear in his answer that LandLink's days were numbered. Yesterday this minister crowed that they could just stick the federal government with the bill for LandLink's mismanagement. Will the minister commit that LandLink will never be given another contract to manage future disaster recovery programs?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've said in this House many times that LandLink has been extended for one year to complete the files on this process. We've already started a new process to look at how we're going to deal with disasters in the future, how we're going to man up for them, what the process is going to be, who might provide support for us. We're working through that process as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Task Force for Teaching Excellence Report

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Education Week. Despite chronic underfunding and overcrowded classrooms, Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world thanks to our outstanding and dedicated teachers. In fact, the ATA is viewed as one of the pre-eminent educational organizations in the world. Yet if implemented, the recommendations from the Task Force for Teaching Excellence would divide and threaten to break up the ATA if it doesn't submit to the Education minister's demands. To the Premier: are you going to let your minister get away with bullying teachers, principals, and the Alberta Teachers' Association?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the minister is not doing any of those things, and neither does the report do what the hon. member said. In fact, if we adopted all of the recommendations of the report, we would not be breaking up the ATA into a union and a professional organization. The report specifically says that we should accommodate the outcomes that are desired under the report without doing that. It only adds

surplusage to say that if you can't do it without doing that, then you should go on to do it. The outcomes of the layout and the process to get there distinctly suggest that it's better to do it with the ATA as the professional organization and the union.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental. The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The Premier has just proven my point: if you don't listen, we're going to bully you.

The government has set up a task force which it claims is arm's length and free from political interference, yet every single member of the task force is directly appointed by the minister, and just to make sure they get the results that they want, they have appointed four PC MLAs to keep watch, not a single rep from the ATA. To the Premier: how can a board hand-picked by the PCs and overseen by the PCs possibly be free of interference from the PCs?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not understand governance. The fact of the matter is that the task force has given its report, and the minister has indicated that the report is now out for public discussion. We have not adopted the recommendations of the report. When the public input comes back from the associations that he's talked about and others, it will go to the TDPAC, which is a committee that's set up between the ATA and government to talk about teacher professional development. So it is a process that's independent of the minister, independent of government. It has made its report, with items for important discussion for the public, and that's what's going to happen now.

Dr. Sherman: Premier, recommendation 25 says that if the ATA doesn't play ball, they're going to divide and conquer the ATA.

Mr. Speaker, the real problems in our public education system are too few teachers, too few supports for the teachers we do have, and too few schools. It seems to me that this government and this report are forgetting the most basic fact. A chronically underfunded school system with overcrowded classrooms is not optimal. Premier, instead of attacking your teachers, why don't you support them for a change by providing adequate, sustainable, predictable . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think I have a pretty good reputation for not attacking teachers and for supporting teachers. I also have a very good reputation for understanding that we have to put our children first, and that means making sure that we have excellent teachers for every student. Excellence in teaching is fundamental to a good education system. We have excellent teachers, and that's why we have a good education system. Any government worth its salt should be looking forward and saying: how do we continue to maintain, build, and grow excellence in the system, and how do we deal with those chronic problems that you have in any system? That's what the task force report is about.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Health Care Budget Oversight

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has presented legislation that will give the Minister of

Health the authority to approve Alberta Health Services' \$12 billion budget. Some might find this an improvement over the board of AHS doing it, but it overlooks a fundamental democratic principle. Since the Magna Carta generations have fought and sometimes died to ensure that the people's elected representatives have control over taxation and government budgets. To the Premier: do you believe in the right of the Assembly to approve the government's budget, including the Health budget, and if so, why are you giving this power to your Health minister?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that must be another one of those humour moments that we were just talking about.

Obviously, the Legislative Assembly approves the Health budget, as it does every budget of government. Obviously, the Legislative Assembly has oversight on the spending of the public's money. Within the Health budget, which is allocated by this Assembly, the Minister of Health works under the prescribed lines that have been approved. One of those lines is the budget for Alberta Health Services, and it's the minister's job to have oversight on that budget after it's been approved by the government.

The Speaker: First supplemental. The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is a joke, and here's the punch line. The budget of AHS is a quarter of this government's entire budget, yet the budget for AHS that we see in this Assembly is only six lines. Six numbers, Minister, for \$12 billion. Albertans expect their elected representatives to scrutinize government budgets and expenditures, but this government has done an end run around democracy. To the Premier: will you pull Bill 12 and introduce legislation that will ensure the Assembly's oversight of the \$12 billion Health Services budget, and if not, why not?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Bill 12 does nothing to change the oversight of this Legislature on the spending of public money, nothing whatsoever. What it does do is give the minister more direct oversight on the grants that have been provided to Alberta Health Services with respect to how they allocate those resources within Alberta Health Services. That is not a change from the oversight of this Legislature or the Treasury Board, for that matter, with respect to public funds. In fact, I'm surprised by the hon. member's questions. I understand that two members of his caucus voted for this just yesterday.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll have more to say about it later.

This is to the Health minister. Home-care workers at Artspace co-op are being paid poverty-level wages with no benefits. They're mostly new Canadians, all women, and are going on strike today. Their employer says that they do not receive enough provincial funding to provide a raise or benefits. Will the Minister of Health agree to review the contract with the Artspace home-care board, Supports for Artspace Independent Living, to ensure that they do have enough funds to provide their workers with a living wage?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly agree with the hon. member that we need to make sure that home-care workers in this province are paid fair wages and do have working conditions that enable them to do what they want to do, which is care for Albertans who require it. I am not going to comment on this specific set

of negotiations. Obviously, I don't want to pre-empt those negotiations, nor will I interfere with them. But I will certainly tell the hon. member that we're monitoring this situation closely. We recognize the very difficult and valuable work that home-care workers do, and we trust that this will be resolved very quickly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

No more preambles, please, to supplementals. Let's start with Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Stony Plain.

2:30 Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The Task Force for Teaching Excellence has recommended a more formalized approach to teacher evaluation and accountability. The Wildrose has always been and will always be in favour of transparency and accountability. However, we also know that the PC curriculum rewrite toward discovery learning is being met with harsh criticism from many, many teachers. To the Education minister: how can we be assured that these new accountability methods aren't just your heavy-handed way of intimidating teachers into accepting your misguided project in our classrooms?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the hon. member doesn't seem to want to understand is that it's outcomes that are important, that curricular standards set what children need to learn and what is expected at certain levels during the education process, and that teachers have responsibility for the pedagogy, ensuring that each student learns in the way that that student can learn best and is excited about coming to school and excited about completing. The assessment of a teacher with respect to their ability would and should be done on the basis of how they engage their students in the learning process. That's the importance of excellence in education. That's what excellence in teaching is all about.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, I would agree that outcomes are important in government also, and that's why we need a new one.

Albertans expect teachers, like everybody else, to be accountable, but this government shouldn't be forcing it's heavy-handed approach on them. Premier, will you admit that this task force is nothing more than a way for your centralized-planning government to force teachers to do what you and your educators want? Isn't it just a way to threaten teachers into teaching discovery learning as you want them to?

Mr. Hancock: You know, Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying when you're a hammer, everything is a nail. This guy appears to be a bit of a hammer on this because he doesn't seem to understand. He doesn't seem to understand the difference between curriculum and teaching pedagogy. He doesn't seem to understand what it takes to keep children excited about coming to school. He doesn't seem to understand that Alberta is not a place like China, where they do 16 hours of homework in math alone in order to achieve the outcomes that they have. He doesn't understand that we have different ways of teaching different students because students have different ways of learning.

Mr. McAllister: What I and thousands of Albertans understand is that the Premier is not the sharpest tool in the shed.

Mr. Speaker, given that parents, students, and academic experts are all speaking about the turmoil that this government is causing our kids in the classroom, given that many teachers are speaking out against Inspiring Education and discovery learning, doesn't the Premier see how disrespectful it is to teachers to force them to toe the line instead of just letting them do what they do best, teach our kids?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has a really confused idea of the world because no one is forcing teachers to do anything. The task force is not talking about forcing teachers to do something. The task force is talking about some of the essential issues – teacher excellence, excellence in education leadership, and assurance – and if there's one thing that the opposition should understand, it's that you do have to have an appropriate assurance model to give people faith and trust in the system. Teachers are very important. We trust teachers. We think teachers are doing a great job in this province, but you do need to address the issues of competence and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Grizzly Bear Conservation

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's bears are awakening from hibernation, and many Albertans and visitors will be hoping to get a glimpse of these majestic and important animals. However, as iconic as our bears are, we often hear stories of them being poached or killed illegally. In fact, more grizzlies were illegally killed in 2013 than in previous years. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: what is being done to protect these bears from being killed illegally?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister for Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are aware that the grizzly bear mortality for this year is higher than it has been in previous years, and we know that the majority of the deaths are human-caused, so we are working with stakeholders. We're working with industry. We're looking at reducing some of the footprint, some of the roadways that we know allow people into certain areas of the province where there's grizzly habitat. We are making sure that we have significant fines in place, and we have a 24-hour report a poacher line so that people can report any problems they're finding or seeing with grizzly bears in the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you. The grizzly bear recovery plan lapsed more than a year ago. What can Albertans expect to see in an updated, effective plan to protect this threatened species in the future?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, within Budget 2014 we've committed more than \$1 million towards grizzly bear conservation and management programs. My department is working with stakeholders right now on a new grizzly bear recovery plan. We hope to have that out later this summer, and we will make sure that all stakeholders have a chance to comment on

the draft plan. We will continue with the plan we have in place until that new plan becomes effective.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental was answered.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Care Facility Restrictions on Family Member Visits

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The decision to seek placement for a loved one is often one of the most difficult times for a family. Knowing that your loved one can no longer manage day-to-day tasks like getting dressed, cleaning, or making dinner is painful. I know this personally. You hope the help they need is available in a care facility. Families are comforted knowing that they can see and visit family even though they've found a new home, yet the stories of Shauna McHarg and Huguette Hébert are troubling. After questioning the care of their loved ones, both have been banned from visiting their families in care facilities, and they're not the only ones. To the Associate Minister – Seniors: why are facilities allowed to punish and ban family members who question care without any explanation?

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, the most important consideration in these matters is the safety and the well-being of the residents in these facilities and their staff, who work with them, and this includes ensuring that they're protected from any aggressive or inappropriate behaviour. I'm not that familiar with this case, but we do need to make sure that the well-being of the residents and the staff is paramount.

Mrs. Towle: It's surprising that he's not that familiar. It's been in the media for the last two years.

Given that it has now been two years since Shauna McHarg has seen her father and that the restrictions on visiting her mother are now in place, all with no explanation from Covenant Health – she filed a FOIP; she went to the Privacy Commissioner to find out and even the Ombudsman, and all agreed she was treated unfairly and should know – and given that Shauna has also reached out to the Seniors' Advocate, who replied to her last week, saying, "Sorry; I have no mandate to assist you with this situation," will the Associate Minister – Seniors step in and order Covenant Health to allow Shauna permanent . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Quest: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I think the member's guest may have been better served if I had known that the guests were actually going to be here today. This is the first that I've heard of it. I certainly would be willing to try and take the opportunity to have a short discussion about the matter and become more familiar with it.

I do want to make the point that these cases are extremely rare, and there are a number of different options that families have with respect to signing behaviour agreements and so on. They can also, again, take the appropriate channels.

Mrs. Towle: She's actually asked your ministry, the Minister of Health. She asked the Seniors' Advocate to arrange the meeting. The hon. member from the Liberals actually introduced her.

Given that Shauna has done everything right – she appealed the ban internally; no response. She did a FOIP to find out why she was banned; no response. She went to the Privacy Commissioner, who ordered Covenant Health to tell her why she was banned; still nothing. Given that she even went to the Ombudsman, who told her that she was being treated unfairly, when are you going to do something and help a family who's advocating for their loved one?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Associate Minister – Seniors said, we certainly have empathy for any family that is in this situation. We cannot pretend to know all of the detailed circumstances of this particular case or others. In fact, I understand that although these cases are very rare, at least one of them is currently before the courts, and I don't know if this particular case is in fact before the courts.

What I will undertake to do, Mr. Speaker, is to go back again and look at the findings that were referenced by the hon. member. I certainly support the notion that anyone who is going to face such restrictions should know the reasons why, and those should be provided by . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Workforce Employment Services

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Guedo Speaker. During this year's budget estimates committee debate the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour announced that there would be a new student job program to replace the STEP grant, which you won't be needing for a few years yet, that many postsecondary students in Alberta had previously benefited from. My question is to the hon. minister. Given that students across Alberta are eager to hear of concrete details about this potentially exciting program, when and what can we expect from this initiative?

2:40

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be the first one to congratulate you on your grandson.

Mr. Speaker, indeed, we do know that young people require assistance with finding employment that is relevant to their education, be it in the polytechnics or universities or colleges. I am working right now with CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students, which is working with our department in a process of designing a new program. The STEP program was previously with Human Services. Now we're in the process of designing a new one out of this ministry.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: until that program comes out, what other supports are in place to offset the elimination of the STEP program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have the Alberta Works offices throughout the province. There are 59 of them, I believe, that do assist all Albertans with locating employment. As we know, one thing for certain is that there is no shortage of employment in this province at all. We have the career information hotline. We have the Alberta information services website as well, that exists in this province.

What we are looking at is not only creating a program that links Albertans to jobs – that’s rather easy – but to jobs that are meaningful to their educational paths.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the hon. minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that many municipalities have relied on operational MSI funding and the STEP program in the past to operate playgrounds and seniors’ programming, what can be done to make up this shortfall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard as we travelled around the province that, especially, smaller communities are challenged with some of these reductions. The MSI operational was really important. We’ve heard that it supports libraries and others, so we’re going to continue to work with our smaller municipalities to look at what options there might be. In the short term there are programs through Culture, like CFEP and CIP, that can help some organizations. Funding in smaller communities is critically important, and we’ll continue to work with our municipalities on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Development Hearing Participation

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is once again disallowing input and advice from NGO groups, like Pembina and the Alberta Wilderness Association, plus the First Nations and others on development hearings. A judge threw out the last decision because the government categorized Pembina and other NGOs as unco-operative environmentalists and instructed staff to scrutinize their applications more critically and bar them from the hearings. This is exactly what outsiders see as a deliberate disregard for environmental concerns. To the minister of the environment: why is the government repeating the same action with the same reasoning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for the environment.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All three of the organizations, the groups that the member across the way has talked, about are valuable leaders and do bring great insight in many conversations about protecting our environment. I know that this group is interested in development decisions, but having an interest in a matter is not the same as being directly affected by that matter. The process at hand is focused on considering the concerns of those who would be directly affected, and they don’t meet the criteria.

Ms Blakeman: Well, okay. Mr. Speaker, what information would be so dangerous, so damaging to economic growth, so detrimental to all-out, never-ending, uncontrolled development that it can’t even be spoken at a hearing? Aren’t hearings formed to hear from all sources?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we don’t run the hearing. We have a quasi-judicial board that runs those hearings.

I can say to you, Mr. Speaker, that following the judicial review we had our department address the issue raised by conducting a second and very thorough review of the statement of concern, and the review independently reached the same conclusion.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: will the minister overturn this decision to bar the opinion of people they disagree with? If he won’t listen, these folks will be driven into the waiting and welcoming arms of a U.S. Senate committee.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, again, we have a quasi-judicial board that is tasked with listening to these hearings and making decisions on who’s in front of them. I’m not about to interfere with that process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Medicine Hat.

Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A week ago this PC government apologized to party members for its failure to listen to the grassroots. Yesterday they backtracked again, this time on pension rollbacks, because they failed to listen to Albertans. It’s clear that they still don’t get it because now they plan to ram through an omnibus bill without written briefings to Assembly members and without listening to Albertans. To the Premier: how can you expect MLAs to do the job Albertans expect when you hide changes to 16 pieces of legislation until four hours before debate begins?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I categorically disagree with the member. I can tell you that the member raised one concern with me. I believe it was with the minerals amendment act. I can tell you that the minister briefed the party on April 22, so three weeks ago. I can say that we sat down and talked with the members, and I answered questions. I again answered questions in the House. We feel that these are just administrative changes, and we’re quite happy with Bill 12, and we’ll move forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, they’re not administrative changes. Given that the Privacy Commissioner has specifically stated that she hasn’t had enough time to fully review the part of the bill that applies to her job and given that she’s already raised preliminary concerns about whether you’ve gotten it right, to the Premier: Albertans don’t want their elected representatives to work over them; they want them to work with them. Why is your government preventing that yet again?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I read the clips this morning from the Privacy Commissioner, and I can say that the Privacy Commissioner’s comments were actually quite positive as to the changes we’re making in the health records act, especially. I have no qualms about where we’re moving forward, and I’m happy to sit down with any Albertan and discuss the merits of Bill 12.

Ms Notley: Well, you’re reading the press release as quickly as you’re reading your bill because you missed the key points. Given that transgendered advocates are saying that they were not consulted and that they are against giving this cabinet carte blanche over when and how they can have their gender acknowledged by this government and given that this matter hardly amounts to a small administrative amendment, why won’t the Premier school his House leader about the difference between a miscellaneous statutes amendment act and an omnibus bill and then do the right thing and just pull Bill 12?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about the pieces of this omnibus bill that I helped champion and, certainly, am very proud to have had constant and ongoing discussions with the LGBTQ community on this. I think what we're doing completely represents their care and concerns. I'm very happy to be able to witness what we're going to see this afternoon. Those relationships are built around mutual respect, inclusion, and acceptance. They are ongoing, and I'm very happy that in my ministry initiative I'll be dealing with them on an ongoing basis.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by St. Albert.

Calgary Film Studio

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations. After a number of years with PC promises made and PC promises broken, the Calgary film studio finally got a green light. While this is a positive step and we know that the film industry is encouraged by this, what we have heard is that in this case there are accusations that there may have been sharing of inside information and rigging of this bid. Can the minister please confirm that her proposal was created with a level playing field in mind for all bidders and that no single bidder was given preferential treatment or insider information?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary film studio is indeed a great development for Calgary and for Alberta and for economic diversification. We received seven RFPs for this film studio. It went through the proper process, and I'm proud to say that the film studio is going to be built.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that there were a number of groups involved in the latest RFP process, as the minister stated, and given that the minister specifically identified the heavy financial involvement of government to be detrimental to the previous project, can the minister explain why she chose the Calgary Economic Development proposal instead of others promoted by the private sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The original proposal had an ask of about \$16 million from the government, so the proposal of the \$5 million that went in was a very prudent way to proceed. At the end of the day, it's a partnership with the city of Calgary, with Calgary Economic Development authority, and a partnership with William F. White from Toronto as the lead tenant.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that there were multiple bidders for the Calgary film studio, can the minister confirm that the Calgary Economic Development proposal she chose will have the capacity to grow and meet the future needs of industry, and will the minister clear the air and make all proposals public to show Albertans that this was a fair and equal process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the Calgary film studio will be leading here in Alberta. We know that there are lots of film, television, and digital media coming right here to Alberta. At the end of the day, we know this project is the

right fit, and it will be a great fit for Calgary, and I look forward to even more film studios being built in Alberta.

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Clerk, if you could just stop the clock momentarily. I'm looking at the clock of the day, and I'm looking at the clock for question period, realizing that we may well go beyond 3 o'clock just to finish question period. Government House Leader, if you wish to put a request forward, we'd be happy to hear it.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask that we extend the daily Routine past 3 o'clock.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, unanimous consent has been asked for to extend our time for the Routine beyond 3 o'clock, which likely will be necessary.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us get started again with both clocks, starting with St. Albert, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, my warmest congratulations to you and your family on the birth of your grandson.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Loyalty Program Prohibition for Prescription Drugs

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, based on decisions by the Alberta College of Pharmacists, as of May 1 Albertans who belong to loyalty and reward programs no longer have the opportunity to collect points when making purchases at their pharmacy. New rules related to these inducements ban pharmacists from offering incentives for prescriptions or other professional services. These changes have drawn opposition from several pharmacy chains and consumer groups. Some have characterized the college's arguments as alarmist, overblown, and disrespectful to pharmacy customers. I've heard this message from an overwhelming number of my constituents. My question is to the Minister of Health. Many Albertans spend thousands of dollars at their pharmacy each year and have . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I regret your 35 seconds have elapsed, and we must go to the answer.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly heard enough to understand the question the hon. member is asking. The short answer to the question is: no, the government will not be stepping into this issue. As I previously outlined, the law delegates the right to set standards of practice to regulated health professions in Alberta, of which the College of Pharmacists is one. It delegates the same authorities to other professions with respect to, as I said, standards of practice. These are medical or professional practice matters. They are not political matters, and it is the college and not the Legislature that sets these standards.

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, consumers have noted that they are more than capable of making their own choices. Outlining this type of decision should be left to Albertans and not the College of Pharmacists. To the same minister: will the government reconsider and have a conversation with the college about this decision?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've certainly had discussions with the college prior to them reaching this decision. They have

laid out the case for me and, I think, for all Albertans about why they think this is an issue that is important to quality of care and patient safety and is also a matter of professional ethics, so we will respect the college's right to make these decisions under the legislation that delegates this authority to them.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: stakeholders pointed to studies indicating that patients see the value in loyalty programs where these incentives have potential to encourage positive health behaviour, including obtaining immunizations, health screening services, and improving medical adherence. Minister, are you willing to actively determine whether these dissolved programs truly outweigh the benefits of having them available to patients?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect I'll remind the hon. member that this is not a consumer issue. This is an issue of health care, and it is within the purview . . .

An Hon. Member: It is a consumer issue.

Mr. Horne: It is not a consumer issue. It is within the purview of the College of Pharmacists to make this decision. The reason that patients are loyal to their pharmacists is the same reason that patients are loyal to their physicians and nurse practitioners and other health professionals. It is because of the trust that patients place in them. It is because of the ability of professionals to prescribe and deliver services that they are trained and regulated to deliver. Mr. Speaker, that is what . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Sherwood Park.

Lyme Disease Testing

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in March I asked a question on Lyme disease, where I addressed the chronic lack of support Alberta Health Services provides to Albertans with this serious disease. Lyme disease is a tick-borne disease and, when left untreated, has serious long-term health effects. Albertans have been contacting my office in desperate need for support, testing, and treatment. Will the Minister of Health apologize to Albertans for failing to ensure they have access to testing and proper treatment?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I know a number of colleagues on all sides of the House have been contacted by constituents about testing for Lyme disease. I can tell the hon. member the same thing that I told him the last time I answered the question. The testing for Lyme disease in this province is consistent with best practices and clinical evidence that's available globally. I recognize that Albertans who may feel they have been bitten by ticks are concerned about Lyme disease. My best advice is to contact their physician or other health professional and receive . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the amount of e-mails and phone calls I have received from my constituents and Albertans all across Alberta, it has become evident that some

health care professionals are refusing to test for Lyme, and this government is forcing Albertans to pay out of pocket and travel out of country for very costly treatments. To the same minister: what progress has been made on this file since my last question, and will you today commit to meeting with myself and concerned families and patients?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly be very surprised if any Albertan could say that they were refused testing for Lyme disease in this province. There are tests that are delivered in the United States, tests that actually, I'm advised by the chief medical officer, do not adhere to the same standards and do not rely on the same clinical evidence that Canadian tests provide. I know that some patients have requested to receive the American testing, but I've been assured by the chief medical officer that the tests that we deliver in Alberta are consistent with current clinical evidence and best practice.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can refute those comments because I have testimony from patients right here that have been refused.

Given that this is clearly an issue affecting many Albertans and given that other governments, both federal and provincial, are already considering legislation to develop broad-based strategies to deal with this problem, when can we expect this government to follow suit and develop a made-in-Alberta solution that ensures we are doing what we can for people suffering with this terrible, debilitating disease?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. member wants to talk about the testing for Lyme disease or the treatment of Lyme disease. If he has information that suggests that anyone in this province has been denied tests for Lyme disease, that are funded in our province under the Alberta health care insurance plan, I'd be very happy to receive his files and to talk to him about those instances. But I repeat that we make decisions in Alberta about the health services we offer based on the current and best clinical evidence that's available. I take advice from the chief medical officer in this respect, and I am very assured that Albertans have access, as I said, to the current and best tests.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Dialysis Service for Strathcona County Residents

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Strathcona hospital is set to open May 21. Sherwood Park has been waiting a long time for this. It is a leading-edge facility, and it includes a 24/7 emergency department. However, not all the services my constituents need are in place in this hospital. The lack of a dialysis unit in Sherwood Park requires residents from Sherwood Park and the surrounding areas to travel to the University of Alberta, Royal Alexandra, or Grey Nuns hospitals. To the Minister of Health: my constituents want to know why the Strathcona county hospital doesn't have a dialysis unit.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad that the hon. member appreciates the excellence in health care that will be

offered to her constituents as a result of the \$130 million facility that was opened in the area last week. With respect to dialysis needs this was taken into account in the planning for the new facility. While I certainly appreciate that people would like the service to be as convenient as possible, I know the hon. member would understand that many of her constituents and the residents in this area are very close to services in Edmonton that provide these services, much closer to home than in other areas of the province.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the lack of an additional dialysis unit in Sherwood Park makes receiving treatment more difficult for many vulnerable Alberta people, will you implement this vital service?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the demand for dialysis services is rising across the province. Increasingly, we are meeting these needs through home dialysis, but we actually have fellow Albertans in northern and rural areas of the province that are having a much more difficult time accessing dialysis services than any of us would like to have.

With all due respect to the hon. member, the facility that opened last week is a state-of-the-art facility and includes many services that you would not find in other parts of the province, and they are also located very close to dialysis . . .

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that this directly affects many of my constituents on a daily basis, what can we expect for a timeline on this decision?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we have no decision under consideration at the moment to establish a dialysis unit at the Strathcona county hospital. What we have is a unique facility, unique in Alberta and in Canada, that, as the hon. member herself mentioned, offers 24/7 emergency services, 27 treatment beds, a CT scanner, mental health and addiction services, a full-service lab, and many, many other services under one roof, that would, in fact, I believe, be the envy of any community across Canada. We'll continue to work to monitor the needs of the community as time goes forward, but we believe we have built the facility that meets . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Drinking Water Contamination Complaint

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ann Craft is a constituent of mine who's been involved in a two-and-a-half-year fight with this government over the contamination of her drinking water due to oil activity close to her property. She has written dozens of letters, made dozens of phone calls, and has had no satisfaction from this government. This is about property rights and this government's lack of action to protect them. To the minister of sustainable resource development: why, after two and a half years and dozens of letters and phone calls, has this government continued to fail my constituent?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the first I've heard of this, but I am prepared to say this to the member. If he gives me the name and the address and the phone number of the constituent, I will personally give them a call, and we will sit down and see what the issues are, and if we can resolve them, we will.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Minister.

Given that the enforcement of environmental concerns resulting from the activity of the energy industry are now under the purview of the Alberta Energy Regulator, will the Minister of Energy order the AER to investigate and rectify the unacceptable conditions on Ann Craft's property?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Minister of ESRD just said, I am also not aware of this incident, but I'd be happy to find out the information from the hon. member, if he'd like to share that with us, and to look at the situation.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's evident that the mail hasn't been read in a couple of these ministries.

Given that the government has allowed Ann's calls and letters to go unanswered for two and a half years and given this issue of property rights, environmental protection, and, quite frankly, a serious public health concern, do the ministers understand why Albertans have completely lost confidence in you, your government, and in the new Alberta Energy Regulator?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I take great offence to the member opposite saying that we don't return letters or answer phone calls. The people in our department are very conscious about the environment, and they're very conscious about the work they do. I will say to you that if a letter was written or if a phone call was made, I would say that those phone calls would be returned. Let me say that we don't always agree with the people on the other end of the phone. The answer might be no, so that person may not be happy. But I will commit personally that I will deal with this issue, and I will talk to that constituent. We'll come to a resolve on the issue.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That concludes our time for question period.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: You have two minutes each for the statements.

Hunger in Alberta

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's world Hunger Awareness Week in Canada, and while there's not a member in this Assembly who wouldn't agree that we are all fortunate to live in this province, Alberta is not immune from the scourge of hunger. According to the Alberta Food Bank Network Association about 53,000 Albertans turned to their local food bank for assistance every month in 2012. That's roughly equivalent to the population of Grande Prairie. What's even more alarming is the fact that 44 per cent of them, nearly half, were children, which is considerably

higher than the national average of 36 per cent. These numbers are too high.

Hunger isn't always in your face and out in the open. It can strike even the hardest working individuals and families, and it can strike without warning. My hometown of High River knows this all too well. In the aftermath of last year's floods thousands of my fellow residents, who had never experienced the pain and uncertainty of not having enough to eat, suddenly found themselves dependent on the local food bank. Even today, 11 months after the fact, the High River Salvation Army food bank is still in a crunch. In March food bank worker Lynn Spencer said this: in the two and a half years I've been working here, I've never seen the shelves this bare of necessities for our food hampers.

Food banks are often the first access point for Albertans in need and the avenue to identify those in need of a helping hand. I'd like to thank them for the work that they do in helping our most vulnerable in our communities in their hours of need.

Today my colleagues from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Medicine Hat, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and Cardston-Taber-Warner have joined me in going without food for the day in order to raise awareness for hunger. I thank them for the support of this important cause. We hope to gain a small understanding of what thousands of Albertans go through every single day.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a place of tremendous opportunity for so many, but occasionally people fall through the cracks. Let this week be a reminder to us all that hunger is a real problem, even in Alberta. Please contribute to your local food bank.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

School Fees

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta families are finding themselves more and more stretched each month when they sit down at the kitchen table with their budget. On top of paying some of the highest rates in the country for housing, food, and utilities, now this government is also expecting Albertans to pick up an ever-increasing part of the tab for their children's education.

The Calgary board of education is struggling with their annual budget. Shortfalls in funding from the government year after year have left them with only bad options. Hard-working families are now faced with increases of up to 53 per cent for some fees. Busing, instructional supplies, and noon hour supervision fees are all increasing, which adds up to several hundred dollars per child for Alberta families.

For one Calgary family already pinching pennies, this means fees of \$1,280 next year, nearly double last year and 4 per cent of their annual family budget. Calgary is not unique. School boards across the province are struggling to find ways to continue to provide top-notch education with little support or commitment from this PC government. Funding on a per-student basis has been decreasing province-wide for four years.

In Edmonton busing and supervision fees can already add up to \$500 per student, and the board may be forced to increase these in June. In Rocky View transportation fees increased by over 25 per cent last year, and now families are faced with another 20 per cent this year. Thanks to this government's misplaced priorities and short-sightedness more and more costs for important public services are being downloaded onto hard-working Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, with family budgets being stretched further and further each month, now this government is leaving behind the

hundreds of thousands of Alberta families who have trusted in public education to ensure successful futures for their children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Robert Thirsk High School Opening

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I proudly attended the grand opening of Robert Thirsk high school along with the former Minister of Infrastructure and school trustees and Dr. Robert Thirsk himself, the well-known Canadian astronaut whom the school was named after.

This is the newest high school in my constituency of Calgary-Hawkwood. It is a big milestone following years of hard work by many stakeholders and the government. The school, which is located in the community of Arbour Lake, has a capacity of 1,500 students and accommodates students from seven surrounding neighbourhoods.

Inspired by Dr. Thirsk, the school believes that the words "personalizing," "connecting," and "thriving" are the living descriptors of the work the school community does, which helps create a vibrant learning environment. Students are active and vocal in learning and participate in various student-led initiatives.

Within eight months of opening, they have already achieved many accolades. They won the city of Calgary championship in junior football. They launched their inaugural FIRST robotics team and hosted the third annual international student leadership summit.

Through advanced technologies and dynamic facilities students have the opportunity to explore their abilities and recognize their full potential. As Dr. Thirsk stated, the sky isn't the limit for those bright minds.

Mr. Speaker, as the area MLA I am so encouraged by the potential demonstrated by those youngsters, so thrilled by the joy expressed by their parents and schoolteachers, and so thankful for the contributions made by our government, which have made a significant difference in my community. This is what we are elected for: to build Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

3:10 Dingman Discovery Well Centennial

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans can take pride in the rich history of our great province. That storied history speaks of this land's first people, Alberta's First Nations, whose culture reflects the beauty of the landscape that is at the heart of age-old traditions and customs. It speaks of our early settlers, who came to this land to till the soil and plant the seeds of a new life for themselves and a future for those to come.

And it speaks of the wildcatters, the dreamers, and the derrick hands who were willing to risk all they had on little more than a gut feeling, on a belief that down below the fertile topsoil lay the promise of even greater riches that would fuel that drive into the future, that would build the success of an entirely new industry and the prosperity of a province still in its infancy.

Mr. Speaker, a deep rumble preceded the gush of oil and gas that spewed forth from Dingman 1 in Turner Valley that Thursday in May, 1914. It was followed by the roar of cheers from those present and those who crowded the streets of Calgary upon

learning the news. The echoes of that celebration, of the excitement and optimism, resonate today as 100 years later we mark this important anniversary and its ongoing impact on the social, cultural, and economic life of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Dingman discovery of May 14, 1914 was the discovery of Alberta's first commercial oil field. That discovery led to the development of the Turner Valley gas plant, the first commercial natural gas processing facility west of Ontario, now both a provincially and federally recognized historic site. More importantly, that discovery touched off a flurry of scientific, technological, cultural, and social exploration.

Mr. Speaker, 100 years have passed since that momentous day in Turner Valley, but not even time can temper the optimism, the determination, the spirit of that day. We have learned a great deal, and the industry that those early pioneers established has grown and continues to grow. Their dreams have become the dreams of all those who have made Alberta the fastest growing province in Canada.

The centennial celebrations being held on May 14, 2014, at the historic Turner Valley gas plant are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations on your grandson. I also have a new granddaughter, that was born last Saturday, Nicola Marie, so we're in good company.

I'm pleased today to rise and recognize Emergency Preparedness Week, an event that takes place in communities across Canada to remind us of the importance of planning and preparation. Planning ahead can significantly reduce the impact of an emergency or a disaster and help the recovery process begin. It takes only a few simple actions to reduce the effects of a disaster.

At the individual level, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are encouraged to have enough food, water, and supplies on hand to survive on their own for 72 hours. They should have one emergency kit in their vehicle and another that they can grab at a moment's notice in case they must leave home quickly.

At the provincial level we are taking action as well, Mr. Speaker, to ensure Albertans are informed when a disaster or an emergency is threatening their community. Alberta emergency alert is the public warning system that alerts Albertans to emergencies over the radio, television, and Internet, and now Android users can download a free mobile app that delivers alerts based on a user's location. I encourage Albertans to sign up to receive alerts so they can have information in real time about impending emergencies or disasters. This initiative is another important partnership between the government of Alberta, local authorities, and broadcasters, where everyone works to communicate life-saving alerts more effectively to Albertans.

We all have a role to play in keeping our communities safe. By working together, we can help ensure the safety of Albertans when disasters threaten our communities. Visit emergencyalert.alberta.ca to learn more.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, and thank you for your kind comments about grandchildren, including mine.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Lacombe

Mr. Fox: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to take a brief moment to talk about one of Canada's greatest places, Lacombe. Just last month Lacombe's Main Street was dedicated as one of Canada's greatest places by the Canadian Institute of Planners.

Our region has deep agricultural roots and a rich history that defines Lacombe's identity to this very day. In Lacombe we wear our love of that history on our sleeves. It's evident when you stroll through our historic downtown. You see it in buildings like the flatiron building, the many murals painted in the downtown core, and the artifacts spread between the Flatiron Museum, the blacksmith museum, and the Michener House museum.

In 1883 Edward Barnett settled the area before the arrival of the railroad. In a little over a decade the little community grew from just a stopping house into a hamlet and soon into a village. By 1902 this bustling little village had a very busy commercial centre and a prominent Main Street. In 1904 the flatiron building became the most prominent landmark on Main Street.

In 1906 a devastating fire burned through Main Street, destroying most of the buildings in the downtown though the flatiron did survive. In the wake of the rebuilding, the Lacombe town council decreed that all frame buildings be brick veneered and that all new structures be of brick construction, and our beautiful downtown was reborn.

I encourage you all to visit Lacombe to enjoy one of our many festivals like the Encore festival, showcasing artwork, poetry, pottery, and photography. Take in Lacombe Days, our annual summer bash, and stop by the Lacombe Culture and Harvest Festival, or maybe you'll decide to capture the charm of the holiday season at our Light Up the Night Festival. Just be sure that while you're here, you check out our Main Street and learn the history behind it at the I Love Main Street exhibit at the Flatiron Museum, so carefully preserved by the passionate people of the Lacombe & District Historical Society.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all members will claim their community as the greatest place in Canada, but in Lacombe, with its Main Street, we actually have an award to back that up.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee it is my honour to table our report, which unanimously recommends the appointment of the hon. Marguerite Trussler, QC, as the next Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five-year term commencing May 26, 2014.

Now that our committee's mandate is complete, I'd like to quickly thank all of my committee colleagues for their dedication throughout the search process and acknowledge the valuable support provided to the committee by the staff in corporate human resources and the Legislative Assembly Office. I have five copies of the report.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of Government Motion 14.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the hon. Marguerite Trussler, QC, be appointed Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five-year term commencing May 26, 2014.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We have a number of these today. Let us move as quickly as we can through them, please, starting with Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to post-secondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A, are clear evidence the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of eight different letters written by my constituents and Albertans that are struggling with Lyme disease. They highlight how our current system leaves many Albertans jumping hurdles as they seek help and answers for their illness. We're only tabling eight today because I wanted to do that before this session ends. There will be many more in the fall.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I understand you have several, so proceed with the first.

Ms Blakeman: I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a long list. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and leader of the Liberal opposition I'd like to table a copy of a news release by the Alberta Teachers' Association in which they talk about the FOIP that they have done, hoping that disclosure of other research activities and findings will determine the extent to which the task force on education used a broad and balanced approach to make recommendations.

3:20

All of the next series relates to the questions that I asked today. The first tabling, obtained from the Edmonton courthouse, is the government approvals policy from Alberta Environment, environmental management division, in particular setting out that any organization that has a portion of its members living in the geographic vicinity of the activity will be considered directly affected.

The next related tablings, then, also from the Edmonton courthouse, are rejection letters from when the oil sands coalition was rejected for the first time for its stand on the hearing on the Southern Pacific Resource Corporation's McKay thermal project. There is a second letter of rejection on that same project. As a result, Mr. Speaker, no NGOs were heard on that application on the STP McKay thermal project, phase 2.

We have the judge's ruling from the Court of Queen's Bench on the last time and on that particular rejection, which I will note says:

In my view the entire process in this case is so tainted by the "Briefing Note" that . . . I need only refer to the applicants' contention that the Director breached the principles of natural justice [et cetera].

I've given you that one.

Then we have a copy of, in fact, the tainted briefing note, which was used by the judge in rejecting what he was doing.

Then we have a very strange – sorry for the editorial statement – press release from the minister in October 2013 for some reason engaging in NDP bashing, including the federal NDPs. I have no idea why they would engage in that, but they did.

Also from the Edmonton courthouse are templates that the government uses to arbitrarily reject or accept applicants for intervenor status. We have the template for that, which was used repeatedly and is quite recognizable.

Also from the courthouse are four letters that are requesting additional information in order to allow intervenor status, followed by three letters that reject individuals for intervenor status although they have provided all the information that was requested.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine in Taber, Alberta, Judy Jensen – she's a very caring daughter – has expressed some concerns about the care that her parents are receiving in a facility, Linden View, in Taber. I have the requisite number of copies outlining some of her concerns, that I would like to table today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today the requisite number of copies of a letter from Mrs. Patricia Lovitt from Bridlewood in Calgary. She's been on a wait-list for shoulder replacement surgery for over two years. She compares this to elder abuse. In the letter she makes some comments on the disconnect between the long wait times and some of the obscene salaries of health executives and compels this PC government to refocus their efforts on our health care system.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Griffiths, Minister of Service Alberta, the report dated June 2013 entitled Condominium Property Act Review: Consultation Analysis Report.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are near the end of the Routine. There are no points of order today. However, there is an important

piece of business that we're going to take a few minutes to address, and that is the recognition of our pages, who serve us daily in this House. There might be a few more outside; I'm just going to ask them to come in here.

I am in receipt of a letter dated May 7, 2014, addressed to me and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly, from the retiring pages. It reads as follows:

Mr. Speaker,

The end of Session signifies something different for everyone. Although many of you are excited to return to your families and constituents, for the Pages this is a bittersweet time. The end of Session is accompanied by the realization that for some of us our time on the Chamber floor has come to an end. We would like to express our sincere appreciation for the incredible opportunity we have had to serve the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

There are countless people who have made this into such an unforgettable experience. We would like to thank the Sergeant-at-Arms for teaching us the meaning of leadership; the Table Officers for their sense of humor and grace under pressure; the staff in 315 and 412 for their constant support and words of wisdom; and the Security Staff for showing us that it's important to find a job you look forward to, with people you enjoy working with. As well we wish to extend our gratitude to the Members of the Legislative Assembly, without whom, our role in the Chamber would not exist. From them we have gained a lot of useful knowledge: practical implementation of democracy to their preference of temperature and ice cube ratio of their water. And we would like to thank you Mr. Speaker. When you took office you encouraged all Members to develop a Credo to guide their work. As Pages we took this to heart, and would like to thank you for your role in developing our motto: [C for] constant vigilance, [R for] rapid delivery, [E for] extraordinary teamwork, [D for] diligence, and [O for] opportunity of a lifetime.

As we reflect on our experiences at the Legislature, we recognize how fortunate we are to have had the "best seat in the house" to witness history in the making, along with previous generations of Alberta Pages. A 1913 Edmonton Journal article describes the Pages as "bright streaks of mischief", and we are honored to join the ranks of Pages whose laughter has echoed under the dome.

For many of us, walking into the Chamber on our first day here felt like walking into a newspaper headline, and we feel extremely privileged to have played even a small role in that story. Through every point of order, amendment, and late night standing division, our time here has been unforgettable. The generosity and hard work of all the Members in this Assembly has shown us the type of leaders we would like to become and the future we hope to aspire to. For many of us this has truly been more than a job, it has been our second home. It has been a great honor and privilege to serve on the floor of the Assembly and for that we would like to say a sincere thank you for this incredible experience.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Cashman, Tierra Stokes, Laura Bryan, Chantelle Bryce, Alyssa Edgerton, Stephanie Nedoshytko, Ben Thronson.

Hon. members, let us thank these wonderful pages with our applause. [Standing ovation]

Hon. pages, words cannot express our thanks, nor can any particular gift, but my deputy is going to try to do both right now.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont and Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure I can't do justice to the wonderful letter that you shared with us that was

written by these very, very bright young people, and I mean that sincerely. I certainly wish you well in your future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker and hon. members, it is with regret that we say goodbye to seven of these hard-working pages at the end of this session. They are Helen Cashman, our head page; Tierra Stokes, our training and development page; Alyssa Edgerton; Ben Thronson; Chantelle Bryce; Laura Bryan; and Stephanie Nedoshytko. Helen, Alyssa, Ben, Chantelle, and Stephanie are retiring as they have now completed their first year of university. Tierra and Laura are both going away for university this autumn.

I ask you to join me in recognizing the efforts of our diligent pages, who daily show patience – and a lot of patience, Mr. Speaker – and understanding of our many demands. They carry out their tasks with attention to duty, including some very, very late nights of work with us.

3:30

On behalf of all members each departing page is given a framed print of the Legislative Assembly as a token of our appreciation. These gifts are from the personal contribution of every member of our Assembly. Along with the gifts are our best wishes. We are honoured to have our pages work with us in the Legislature to serve Albertans. I ask our Deputy Chair of Committees to hand a gift to our head page, Helen Cashman, who is representing all the retiring pages. Helen, in turn, will present each of the rest of the retiring pages with their gifts from us later.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to our pages.

The Speaker: Thank you, all, and thank you for participating and for the wonderful tributes that have been given to you all. We wish you everything the best in your future careers, and we hope that the memories you have made here will come back to you often and that they will be as wonderful for you as they will be for all of us. God bless you all, and good luck to you.

That concludes our Routine. I believe we can move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

13. Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to:
 - (a) the Standing Committee on Families and Communities be approved: that Mr. Webber replace Mr. VanderBurg, that Mr. Pedersen replace Mrs. Forsyth as deputy chair, that Mr. Fox replace Mrs. Forsyth.
 - (b) the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be approved: that Ms Kennedy-Glans replace Mr. Dorward.
 - (c) the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship be approved: that Mr. Cao replace Mr. Webber, that Mr. Hale replace Mr. Anglin as deputy chair.
 - (d) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. Jeneroux replace Ms Fenske.
 - (e) the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund be approved: that Ms Redford replace Mr. Sandhu.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other speakers to this motion?
If not, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

The Speaker: The Hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 39(1) so that we can proceed with the debate on Government Motion 14.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, unanimous consent has been requested in order to deal with Government Motion 14.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ethics Commissioner Appointment

14. Mr. Campbell moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the hon. Marguerite Trussler, Q.C., be appointed Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five-year term commencing May 26, 2014.

The Speaker: Are there any speakers to this motion?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 14 carried unanimously]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: I'll recognize the first speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Yes. I'm pleased to be able to rise again in Committee of the Whole on Bill 11, having spoken to it a few times yesterday, and now am pleased to move an amendment to Bill 11.

Ms Blakeman: Amendment?

Ms Notley: An amendment.

So what I am going to do is . . .

The Chair: If you'd just pause for a moment, hon. member, and circulate the amendment to the table as well. I'll be back to you in just a few moments.

This will be amendment A7, hon. members.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you may proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This amendment is as follows. I'm moving that Bill 11, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by adding the following after section 17. In 17.1 the following is added after section 131:

131.1 For the purposes of section 131(1)(d.1), no regulation shall be made prior to being considered by an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly.

The point around this motion goes back to the conversation we had at some length yesterday, where members from all parties were struggling with how to deal with the application of the publication ban, when it would be used, who would get access to it, who it would apply to, all those kinds of things. What this is an attempt to do is to ensure that all members of the Assembly can discuss appropriate regulations that would constrain and/or circumscribe the rules around the publication ban's use by the government. So it provides an opportunity for there to be public, open discussion and committee discussion to consider all the interesting possible scenarios that we needed to prepare for.

I think this is an opportunity to find a collective win on this particular issue and for all parties who have an interest in this issue as well as all members of this Assembly to participate in trying to come up with the best application of the rule around when fatalities are published.

I urge members of this Assembly to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the Minister of Human Services, we are happy to accept this amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, should we call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A7 carried]

The Chair: Are there other speakers?

Ms Notley: I do have another amendment here. I'm sorry, but you knew it was coming. I'm pretty sure you're not going to vote for it, so I really feel the need to explain why that's not a good decision. I'm going to do that. I'm going to just hand that over to you guys, and you can distribute it. Let me know when I can speak again.

The Chair: I certainly will, hon. member. Did you send me the original?

3:40

Ms Notley: I did, I think. Let me just check. I did.

The Chair: Hon. members, if an original turns up on your desk, I'd ask to trade it with you, to the chair, please. We seem to have misplaced the original.

Hon. member, you may proceed, but I'm still waiting for the original. This will be A8.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment is one that ought not to surprise people who have been closely following this debate, because I have telegraphed my belief that this is what

we need to do even before we got into discussion on the bill, even when the minister first started talking about some of the changes he wanted to make.

What this amendment does is that it amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014, and it also amends through that the Child and Youth Advocate Act. In essence, even though it's very long, all it's really doing is injecting the word "may" into every subclause so that there was the ability to exceed one subclause from the "may," and that is subclause (d), which I've added, and subclause (d) says that the children's advocate "must."

What we're asking that this Assembly direct that the children's advocate must do is

investigate systemic issues arising from

- (i) a serious injury to or the death of a child who at the time of the injury or death was receiving a designated service referred to in sections 1(e)(i) . . .

carrying on. The other one:

- (ii) the serious injury to or death of a child who at any time during the 2-year period immediately preceding the serious injury or death received a designated service.

What this does is that it builds on the expansion of the mandate to the children's advocate in that we understand that the act already allows the advocate to go back two years to look at serious injuries or deaths that occurred in the previous two years. It incorporates that, but it also mandates that the advocate actually engage in an investigation in each of those cases.

Now, we have a general sense of what it is we are looking at here in the numbers, because we're able to go back to what those numbers have been over the last 10 or 15 years, and we're probably looking potentially at a number on an annual basis somewhere around 30 investigations a year. So it's not an overwhelming number.

What it does do is that it gets back to that foundational principle that I have been repeating over and over and over again since I was first elected in 2008, which is that when we review what happened in these circumstances, the review must, first, be independent and, second, must be transparent. We cannot have a plethora of internal reviews with hand-picked expert committees from this place and that place and this mandate and that mandate, where the reports almost always end up staying internal and where nobody acts on them and the public is unaware of what's going on.

We tried to deal with this issue in the Leg. Offices Committee back in December. Rather than directing that the children's advocate do more investigations, what we would do is simply increase his resources so that he had the resources to do an adequate number of investigations. As you may know, Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that in the last completed year for which we have information, 2012-2013, there were roughly 20 files that were sent to him by the ministry, and only four investigations took place. He explained to us in fairly good detail how that happened. Basically, what is sent to him is a one-page document from the medical examiner's office, and based on that, he has to make a decision whether or not to designate more resources to doing a more detailed investigation of what happened. Whether the public ever becomes aware in general of the systemic issues that surround a child's death only happens based on a one-page sheet from the medical examiner's office. In my view, that is not adequate.

We had a very dramatic situation here last fall when suddenly these numbers starting pouring out of the *Edmonton Journal* and then subsequently pouring out of the government. You know, we went from 10 fatalities a year to suddenly talking about hundreds and hundreds of fatalities. Then we heard: oh, well, it was all

natural deaths, so we don't need to worry about it. Then we learned that, no, a lot of these actually involved very serious systemic issues of neglect, which, coincidentally, are the same issues that the children's advocate has been talking about for many years but not in really specific terms because we didn't have the specific information upon which to have that specific discussion.

This is about actually injecting clarity, transparency, and independence into what's going on so that we can make the best, most reasoned, thoughtful, well-informed decisions about how to stop that from going on in the future. As much as I said yesterday that the minister's additional review programs that he's got in this act will probably serve to improve best practices within the ministry context – and there's certainly nothing bad about that; quite the opposite, it's probably good – it would not do anything to increase the independence and the transparency of the oversight of the system as a whole. This amendment is geared to that objective.

I ask members of the Assembly to accept this amendment so that we can actually demonstrate that we have the most independent and transparent system for review possible. I think that would serve the interests of all Albertans, certainly those very vulnerable Albertans who are the subject of these kinds of considerations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm inclined to support this amendment but maybe not for the same reason specifically as the sponsoring member. I'm inclined to support it because of the transparency that it offers. As I move through my constituency and go to other events and listen to people, as I read and research election issues about why the number of voters that we have participating is declining and why we can't capture a younger voting demographic, I keep hearing the same thing over and over again, and that is: "We want to be more involved. We want to be closer to the decision-making process. We want to have a better understanding of how government is doing things."

My first reaction to that was: "Oh, for heaven's sake, there are lots of opportunities. There are policy conventions that are offered by every political party. There are lots of different ways to get involved." But the more I listen, the more I come to understand that it's more than that. I don't know that it's specifically about decision-making. I think it's about understanding the process. When decisions come out, for example, from an independent legislative officer like the children's advocate, people go: "Why would they make that decision? Why was that done? Why was that choice made?"

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

We've had such a building of secrecy, partly to make us look important. If you're the one hoarding the information, you're the king or the queen. I mean, you know it all. Nobody can challenge you, right? Nobody can say, "You should have done it differently," or, "You're wrong." But what's happened to us is that that hoarding of information, those walls that have been built to not allow people to watch us make decisions and understand what influences decisions: that has actually made people feel disconnected from what's going on. I think they want to be able to tell, to know. The reaction that I always get from politicians is: "Oh, my God, no. We don't want the public to actually be scrutinizing what we're doing because, you know, they won't

understand; they won't have the background. They'll get involved, it'll be vexatious, and it'll just draw the whole thing out to no real purpose." I disagree.

3:50

My experience has been that when you give people that information, they do take the time to read it and understand it, and for the most part that's it. They go away saying: "Okay. I understand why they made that decision, and I agree or I disagree." But away they go. I haven't seen or experienced, you know, a huge number of interfering, vexatious issues being raised around that.

I'll give you a very small example. I have always published the budget broken down into about 20 categories for my constituency office. I publish it every year in my annual report. I just thought: well, they're paying for it; they should see it, right? That just seemed obvious to me. I have always put along with that that anyone that wants to come in and actually scrutinize it line by line is more than welcome to do so. We just request that they make an appointment because we would have to have someone sitting there with them on the computer just for the privacy of the other things that are going on in the office at the time.

You know, no one has ever taken me up on that. I think it's because they don't need to. They can see how much money we got. They can see how we spent it. I have had a few people phone and say: well, why was this so high or that so low? I've been able to explain it, and that's good. So I've had the opposite reaction. People have not, you know, peppered my office with phone calls demanding to know much more detail. Rather, it's given them enough information that they've left me alone. I think that's what we need more of across all of our processes.

Every time I'm sitting on an act review committee or a policy field committee or anything like that that's doing work, I always put a motion up as early in the proceedings as possible to say that, you know, all of the documents that we use to make decisions should be posted, must be posted to the website so the public can understand how we reached a decision. If people are not willing to have their documents posted, then I say – and so far I've had agreement from my committee colleagues – that we will not use the document. I really believe that people should be able to go on that website, read what we read, and understand how we came to a decision based on that material. If we're reading secret stuff, that nobody else gets to see, then we've got a problem.

What's being anticipated here in the motion put forward by Edmonton-Strathcona is that this information is made much more readily available, and I agree with that. I mean, I've just gone through a number of examples of why I think it's important but particularly around children who are injured or die while in the care or under intervention services from the government. One of the most intimate and vulnerable acts that the public turns over to the government is: please look after our children. If for some reason a family is not able to look after their children, to hand your child over to the government is the ultimate gesture of trust, and we should be able to reinforce that trust, we the public, we the media, we anybody that wants to understand the details of what went wrong in a situation. How the government and the children's advocate decided to work their way out of it is important information, and I think it should be valued as that. I have great trust that the public will not abuse that. For that reason I support the amendment that has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to comment on this in Committee of the Whole for Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act. I do believe

that what is included in this amendment could lead us to a better understanding and, you know, ultimately, maybe better education and fewer kids that end up in the custody and care of the government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my honour to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. I mean, I'll keep my comments brief, but I think it's important that all members of the Assembly understand what this amendment is proposing.

First of all, it's separating the different functions of the advocate or giving him or her the ability to not have to choose between one or all of the subsections, giving the advocate more freedom to be able to do a combination of things: may communicate and visit with the child; on their own initiative assist in appealing or reviewing a decision. It's talking about participating in processes where decisions are made. I think that this amendment from the onset, Madam Chair, is quite a reasonable amendment, but the point that I think is specifically very important within the amendment is under (d): the advocate "must investigate systemic issues arising from . . . a serious injury to or the death of a child" while in care or who was in care within the previous two-year period.

I think that that's very important, and this amendment does strengthen the bill, which, again, is obviously the goal of the Assembly when we're in committee. So I strongly urge that all members accept this amendment so that we can strengthen the role and the abilities of the advocate even more.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you hon. member.

Are there any other speakers to amendment A8?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other speakers on Bill 11 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Campbell: I move we rise and report Bill 11.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The Committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 11. Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by

the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Do all members concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? That's carried.

4:00 **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading

Bill 12
 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate May 6: Mr. Anderson]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think I'm behooved to speak to this omnibus bill. You know, I have some initial comments before I get into the bill. Again, this isn't the first time that I've gotten up in this House and spoken to the breakneck speed with which this PC government rams through legislation. I find it sad and actually a misnomer that this bill is merely housekeeping. When we are amending over 16 different acts with one piece of legislation – and some parts of this are significantly changing acts – it's dishonest to call this a housekeeping bill. I've heard stories in the past that when there were two or more acts being amended, they would actually be separated out into separate pieces of legislation and not just thrown in as one massive bill without agreement from all parties.

You know, part of where some of my comments yesterday were coming from was that I was assured by the government that changes were going to be relatively minor and that there were some positive steps or positive amendments within this bill. But it's clear, upon further reading of this bill and interpreting it, that this simply isn't true.

Madam Speaker, it's worth mentioning that the purpose of having a Westminster system, or a multiparty system, is to ensure that there are different perspectives and points of view represented in the House. In order for the opposition to do our job, we need time to be able to go through a bill, read it, interpret it, look at how we can improve it, come up with different ways of improving it, and then submit amendments, which all takes time.

I mean, we appreciate the hard work that the table officers do in taking our amendments and then putting them into proper form. But when we rush through pieces of legislation such as this bill – the fact that we're already on third reading, Madam Speaker, is actually not doing the bill nor Albertans any justice. Again, you know, we don't live in a one-party state, although some who have been born in the last 43 years may think so. The purpose, again, of having an opposition is for us to be able to debate. I would argue that when we rush through legislation, we're unable to do our job, and we are doing a disservice to Albertans.

I can also comment that despite the fact that the government has been cautioned by various opposition members or encouraged to accept amendments on various bills, in my short two years being a member in this House, Madam Speaker, there have been several bills that have come back to be amended because, again, the government rushed through the bill in the first place, despite the amendments and opposition calls to slow down the process and to seriously consider some of the amendments put forward by the opposition parties.

My concern is, first of all, the speed with which we're moving this through but also all of the different acts that it affects and the fact that we could be here, well, this fall, back in the House amending some of the pieces of this bill.

So I'll move through this fairly briefly. Regarding the Health Information Act the OIPC just saw these changes on Monday – and today is only Wednesday if I'm not mistaken – so they're still reviewing them. First of all, that highlights one of the flaws with what we're doing here. I mean, legislation should be developed and passed through consultation, review, analysis with stakeholders. Again, there have been numerous examples where there have been claims that groups have been consulted, yet when opposition parties – and I would go so far as to say that when approached by all three opposition parties, that's not what we're hearing as far as different groups having true dialogue and input into a bill.

You know, one of the problems with this one piece is that we as MLAs represent thousands of constituents and their voices, and we need time to consult with the people that we're representing. With this time frame, obviously, none of that is possible.

The section regarding health information refers to what comprises a small section of the bill within the expertise, though, of the office of the Privacy Commissioner. As the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has pointed out, they haven't been able to fully review the changes yet. There are some concerns with the language, with how it's written.

Regarding the vital statistics birth certificate changes I want to point out what I think Jan Buterman of the Trans Equality Society of Alberta said, and I quote: the problem with regulations is they can be changed on a whim; they don't have to be brought into the Legislature, so it can be quite secret; my impression was that this was going to be quite thoughtful, and this doesn't exhibit any of that. End quote. I think that points to a very large problem with this bill and with this section when we're talking about vital statistics and birth certificate changes.

You know, when we're making these kinds of changes, they should be happening through legislation, where there is time to debate and where there's an opportunity to debate. Any time a bill passes through this House allowing ministers to make regulations which are going to greatly affect people, that's a real cause for concern, Madam Speaker. First of all, this government should not be rushing through legislation that impacts Albertans in a very personal manner. We should be sitting in this House debating pieces of legislation until we get it right. There shouldn't be any rush.

The other issue, quite frankly, is that gender is not something that should be left to the whim of the cabinet to decide behind closed doors, without consultation and without assurances of proper consultation. I would imagine that there are several members of this House that are quite surprised to learn that these types of decisions will be made behind closed doors and through regulation, not through legislation.

I'm going to move to the Government Organization Act. The amendment changes the definition of a court award in reference to trade agreements that can be defined under registration, which is troubling, Madam Speaker, because it turns the definition into something flexible or pliable, that can be construed or misconstrued. That's dependent on the cabinet of the day and their feelings toward how they want to apply this piece of the act. For example, one of the concerns is: what if there's a PC-friendly company that has an important case to go before the courts? Why should the standards be able to be changed quickly or modified in favour of a company or – let's flip that around – to work against a company that maybe is not in the government's favour?

You know, under this piece within this omnibus bill, Madam Speaker, regulations don't provide the same weight as legislation. As well, regulations aren't discussed and debated in this House, which is a real cause for concern.

As far as the Mines and Minerals Act the changes have been sold as extending the period for auditing royalties – that is true; they do that – but it actually appears to be a rewrite of the royalty audit legislation in general. It's concerning that in rewriting how royalty audits are governed, again the government has left incredible amounts up to regulation. You know, at least the Alberta NDP caucus has been asking the government to put it into legislation and not leave it up to regulation.

4:10

Within this example, again, you know, regulations are more flexible. They can be decided by the minister. They can be changed by cabinet. They're not subject to the full legislative process. As well, Madam Speaker, that opens up our audit system to the possibility in the future that if a specific royalty case is coming up and there's lobbying from the company about to be audited, suddenly the regulations are changed in such a way as to either provide more wiggle room to the company or to protect them. Again, that's cause for grave concern.

I mean, any time we leave something of this magnitude up to an individual minister or cabinet for their decision, which is made behind closed doors – we don't know what kind of influence they may succumb to or are put under – this causes real concern. Again, you know, the purpose of this Assembly is to have open and honest debate. When we leave things to the cabinet of the day, regardless of which party is in government, I will add, there is real cause for concern because that, in fact, Madam Speaker, threatens the very fabric of democracy.

For those reasons, I will not be supporting the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, and I strongly urge the government to do likewise. Let's send this bill back to the drawing board. Let's pull out these pieces. Again, when we're making changes to over 16 acts, that is significant. There is nothing housekeeping about that. Let's break them out into individual bills. Let's have the proper time to debate it in this House and to engage members. Let's ensure that members of the community and organizations and representatives have the time to provide feedback and are consulted during the process, not after the fact, Madam Speaker. Consultation doesn't mean you change the rules to a game, and then you say: "So what you do think about the rules? Well, right. They're already changed." That's going about it in the wrong way.

We still have time in this House, albeit this bill has passed through Committee of the Whole, to the great frustration of myself, my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, and my colleagues from the Alberta NDP. We still have an opportunity to not push this bill through and to break out the different pieces into separate pieces of legislation and give them the proper time that they require.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have 29(2)(a).

Seeing no one interested in 29(2)(a), we will move to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks very much, Madam Speaker. It's my first opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 12, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has said so eloquently, this borrows a page from their federal cousins, who know a lot about omnibus bills and, clearly, are

trying to ram a whole bunch of unrelated issues while at the same time clouding the fact that, especially in Health, which I spent a lot of time looking at, there's a disconnect between what the minister is now taking over as a responsibility and what the Legislature actually learns from budget debates, which happen to exclude Alberta Health Services.

Here we are in the Legislature on the one hand holding the minister accountable for a budget of which we only hear roughly a third. That to me is the most egregious part of this kind of an attempt to centralize power around health services without acknowledging that while the minister does take responsibility for the health care system ultimately, we now have an Alberta Health Services that spends two-thirds of the budget without actually having any ability in the Legislature to review the details of that extensive budget and ensure that Albertans are getting value, that the health care system indicators are there, that we have reports indicating improvements in quality, access, and cost-effectiveness, which is our fundamental role.

This omnibus approach to so many issues leaves me cold. One can give credit to adopting the gender-neutral language and harmonizing the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act with the federal Civil Marriage Act and codifying civil marriage as the law, which codifies civil marriage as the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others. That's basic, and one can appreciate that finally, in the 21st century, we're getting there.

Ramming all of these issues – vital statistics; freehold mineral rights; government organization; charitable fundraising; the Societies Act; the Regional Health Authorities Act, including community health councils; the Health Information Act amendments requiring disclosure of a compromise of personal data, that we supported – but combining that with amendments related to allowing the commissioner to disclose information, amendments related to not disclosing information in the role of the commissioner and amendments related to the role of the Crown prosecutor, amendments related to regulations is a dog's breakfast, if I may use that analogy, with, of course, very little opportunity for us to consult with affected parties, very little opportunity to research this in the depth that it would justify.

It leaves us struggling a bit to want to support some of the good aspects of it while rejecting some of the duplicity that's here, as I say, with respect especially to the lack of accountability in health care and the centralization of control and, I would argue, the politicization now of our health care system. The man at the top is determining not only the health and wellness side of the system, the administration of the system, but now the leadership of the system – the vision, the principles, the planning, and policies – and is now also overseeing the budget and day-to-day operations.

Again, this not only raises questions about what the motives are here and how this is going to improve quality, access, and affordability, but it raises questions about how much more reactivity and instability we're going to create when political problems arise in the health care system, when crises arise, and the minister is drawn in again to make changes, reactions to problem areas that don't serve the longer term interests but serve short-term political interests. It's difficult to follow.

Some aspects of the administrative changes here and the language changes I believe are positive, but I cannot support especially the issues and cloudiness around the Regional Health Authorities Act and even the community health councils, for which it's not clear who is accountable in terms of how their advice at the community health councils gets translated into any kind of positive changes in the health care system. Why, indeed, Madam Speaker, would we have community health councils if their advice can be ignored, if regional differences and regional

challenges and regional needs all have to go through the minister's office and there is this, I guess, political sensitivity around a lot of the changes that may be requested at the local level?

We need to shift much more of the decision-making and monitoring and accountability to regional levels so that we can get a timely response: appropriate listening to front-line workers, assessment of quality at the interface with patient care. Also, the community health councils deserve to have a fair hearing when they are sincerely and respectfully presenting local and regional conditions that need to be addressed.

I will not be supporting this omnibus bill and would strongly suggest that although it's too late to sever these things, we should be trying to address some of these key issues in a different way. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are there any other members that wish to speak to Bill 12 in third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to this bill. I feel like I have so much more to offer to this debate now, a full 24 hours after speaking to it the first time and a full 28 hours after having our staff get a briefing on the majority of the bill.

As I've stated before and as I talked about in question period, Madam Speaker, I am very concerned about the process of this bill, the fact that this government has characterized it as being minor administrative changes. In fact, what we've got are 16 acts which are being amended, many of which are substantive, with little or no opportunity for the opposition to engage in a thorough review. I will say that I'm deeply frustrated by that.

As I said earlier today, it seems like this government really hasn't learned their lesson. I mean, it's been the apology road show for the last two weeks, Madam Speaker, with your folks having to constantly try and make up for the fact that they've been railroading over the wishes of Albertans on a number of different files. You'd think they would have listened or maybe taken some of that to heart, but the very same day that one of those step downs is going on, we introduce this piece of legislation and think that we can railroad it through in two days. You know, this is a sign of a government that has a problem. It's maybe admitted that it's got a problem, but, like with Rob Ford, we don't exactly know where they are right now. Are they in treatment? I'm not so sure. That's what we're dealing with.

Ms Blakeman: That's mean.

Ms Notley: Well, I know it's mean, but then I'm kind of little frustrated, too.

You know, the leopard is not changing its spots. Let me just talk about this a little bit, but before I do, I'd like to make sure that I have the time to move my amendment before I run out of time to speak because I have a tendency to go on without realizing it.

I would like to move an amendment to this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we'll just pause while we have that amendment distributed throughout the House. Can we have the original copies brought to the table, please?

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This amendment simply states that the motion for third reading of Bill 12, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 12, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

The reason for this, of course, as I've stated, is that this piece of legislation has far too much substance jammed into it, and we've gotten nowhere near enough of a briefing. We've not had enough time to analyze this piece of legislation, and it is simply moving too quickly. Even in the 24 hours since people got a sense of what it includes and up to now, we've seen notable feedback from the public. Frankly, were it to go back to its sort of apologetic little self and find its inner politician that wants to get re-elected again, they would admit that probably it would be a better idea to stop and consult a little bit on some of these things.

What do we have going on here? Well, the first one, that I'll start with, relates to the Mines and Minerals Act and the freehold minerals act. Now, I have commented in question period and also outside of question period that we didn't get written briefings on this piece of legislation. As it turns out – and I must correct the record – it does appear as though some effort was made to give our office a written briefing on these two of the 16 amendments about a week and a half ago, two weeks ago. [interjection] I'm told that your office got one, as did the Wildrose office get one. We didn't get one because there was a communication misstep. I should acknowledge that that's what the minister is telling me is true, so I'm sure that it is the case.

Just as a result of working through this miscommunication, just about an hour ago I did get a copy of the written brief that we would have gotten a week and a half ago. I need to point out, however, that the difficulty with that written brief is that although it helps to focus and it's an absolutely necessary part of the process of ensuring that opposition members understand what a matter is about, there is no question that that has to be paired with an actual examination of the legislation itself when you finally see it. Of course, the legislation was only introduced on Monday, so basically we had to put the two together.

I have to say that with this particular ministry in the past I have been briefed by or gotten documents from this particular ministry that say: oh, this is just about regulatory efficiency and making things move more efficiently and faster, because we're all about growing business, yada, yada, yada. Then when you actually get the piece of legislation in front of you and you dig down, you find out that they've changed the rules so that – wait for it – the minister's office doesn't have to interfere with whether Pembina gets to be at a hearing anymore. We've now given that direct statutory authority to the review panel to ensure that they never have to let Pembina and others like them participate in environmental review hearings.

The point is that you need to actually look at what the government is saying that the legislation is about, because that's important, but you also still need to go back and look at the legislation and compare it to what was there before. That's a process that typically takes more than 24 hours, particularly when you're looking at 16 pieces of legislation. That is my concern. I appreciate that we did have an offer of a written briefing about a week and a half ago, I assume, but still we needed to see the legislation first, so we're still rushing.

On that issue as well, I'm also a little concerned because what we're doing is giving this minister and the government the ability to make regulations around salt caverns, which I have now had just a couple of moments to do a bit of research on, and I understand that that is where we are storing liquid natural gas.

Apparently, in Alberta we store over half of the liquid natural gas for the whole country in salt caverns. Also, apparently, Madam Speaker, this has actually proven to be quite a safety and environmental hazard in other jurisdictions. In my view, this is not an administrative matter. This is actually something that continues the long progress that we've made in this province towards just doing everything we can for the oil and gas industry without ever talking to the public about what the implications of that are to their clean air, clean land, and clean water; for instance, the fact that we have fracking happening all over the place and that we've never actually talked to the public about what the limits might want to be on that vis-à-vis urban development or its impact on groundwater or all those other things. This is not meaningless. That's what I have to say about that piece.

Now, let's talk about some of the other changes in there, Alberta Health Services. Now, it is correct that yesterday I said: well, gee whiz, you know, I guess that giving the minister the chance to have some oversight over the Alberta Health Services budget is a step forward. Who knew that he didn't have a yea or nay on that? As the leader of our caucus quite articulately pointed out today in question period, what would be even better would be if the Legislature had oversight of that budget and that rather than being allowed to only debate six envelopes in a \$14 billion budget, we in fact were able to look at that budget in the same way that we were able to look at any other budget that comes before this Legislative Assembly. That is actually a substantive and important piece of public policy that we should be discussing.

It is not administrivia, Madam Speaker, and for this government to suggest it is administrivia is profoundly disrespectful not only to the members of this Assembly but also to every single Albertan who depends upon our health care system, which I think is just about everybody. So that's the problem with that.

4:30

Now, the Health Information Act. The Government House Leader got up in question period today and said: oh, well, I read a press release from the Privacy Commissioner, and she's just okely-dokely with this. As I said at the time, I think that's an example of what happens when you try to read a press release in two minutes or you try to read a bill in 24 hours. You miss stuff. Just to be clear, the Privacy Commissioner did not say that she was okely-dokely with these changes. She actually pointed to two particular sections, and she said: "You know what? I think you might not be getting it right here. I have some concerns about a couple of different sections of what you're doing." She also said: this is my preliminary review because to review – I've only seen the legislation for the last 24 hours – I probably need a bit more time.

This person works day in, day out with this piece of legislation, and that's how she responds, yet somehow on behalf of the people of Alberta we're supposed to come in here and be able to analyze not only that change to that act but changes to 15 other acts in a 24-hour period and do it well and responsibly on behalf of the people we represent. Well, Madam Speaker, that is disrespectful to those people we represent, and it is ridiculous to expect that that can happen here. This is happening because this government is embracing the Harperesque approach to governance, which is: just jam it all in, as much as you can, and try to avoid any kind of legislative transparency, oversight, debate, wisdom, any of that, as much as possible. So that's the problem with that.

Then the other issue that we also have identified, of course, again, is the feedback from advocates within the transgendered community. Now, we had minister here who – I don't know. She's the minister of things we want to talk about on any given day. I'm

not exactly sure what her actual associate ministry title is. But the fact of the matter is that she sort of got up and suggested that: "Oh. We've consulted with everybody in the LGBTQ community, and they all love the way we are approaching the changes to gender identification on birth certificates." Well, in fact, they haven't.

In fact, a leader in that community, who is unquestionably a leader – does he speak for everybody? No. But does he speak for many people? Absolutely. That leader has said unequivocally that (a) he was never consulted, (b) his organization was never consulted, (c) he disagrees with the model the government is pursuing, the whole idea that the cabinet will come up with the rules around how he can prove his gender to the government. As I said before, you know, there are great folks over there, but that is not a group of people that I want deciding about how or when or if I identify my gender. It's just not the way it should work.

They are saying that what they should have in legislation is an unequivocal right to swear an oath: this is my gender, full stop at the end. It puts the decision with the citizen, with the person. That's what they're saying, and that should be in the legislation. That's a fundamentally different model than: well, you know, we'll all sit around quietly behind closed doors, and we'll come up with the rules and the hoops that you have to jump through.

Again, Madam Speaker, that is not administrivia. That impacts seriously and significantly the lives of many Albertans, and we're just sliding it through like it's no big deal. That's what happens when you are sloppy and when you are rushed and when you are basically trying to sprint out of this building as fast as possible to deal with political issues within your somewhat stressed political organization, which is what's going on with these government members. It's bad governance, it's bad for the people of Alberta, it's disrespectful to the members of this Assembly, and it should be rejected in its entirety. These issues should all just come back, first of all, with an adequate amount of consultation with the people who are affected; secondly, with an adequate amount of time for members of this Assembly to engage in an informed discussion about what these things mean; and, thirdly, separately so that each issue can be given the attention it deserves.

I urge members of this Assembly to support this motion and agree that this bill should be not now read but instead should be read this day six months hence.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just because I didn't introduce this amendment, this amendment will be known as amendment HA. It's a hoist amendment.

We have 29(2)(a) if anybody would like to use 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any other speakers who wish to speak to this amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure that we need to do a hoist on this. I think the purpose of the member was to draw attention to what was happening here increasingly, and for that I appreciate it. I don't think I really want to have to deal with this again in six months. I think the situation she's trying to draw attention to is well made. I kind of skimmed the whole topic when I was first talking about this.

I have to say, Madam Speaker, that there have been some changes that are really hard for me and maybe all members of the opposition – I don't know – to deal with. I don't know whether it gets attributed to the faster speed of communication, with electronic and digital communications, with instant messaging, the thing on the phone – you'd think I don't do this stuff all the time.

An Hon. Member: Texting.

Ms Blakeman: Texting. Thank you. With texting, with e-mails, with Twitter, with Facebook. Maybe that's why I don't know.

I'll tell you what's happening increasingly to me and to my caucus. There is this demand from government for instant turnaround. I'm increasingly getting e-mails, well meaning, by the way – it's a nice offer, and I'm glad to have it; let me say that – from aids, executive assistants that are saying: "Okay. The briefing will be held at this time at this place. Please respond to us by 4 o'clock." I look at the timing on the e-mail, and it was sent at, like, 1:52. I thought: "Okay. So two hours to respond to this e-mail." Well, interestingly, at 1:52 I'm in the House, and I'm not supposed to be reading e-mails. I'm not supposed to read those e-mails until about 3 o'clock. Generally, I tend to be on duty a lot. I'm dealing with what's in front of me in the session, so I'm not always hooked up to that electronic media and aware of all these messages that have come in to me. No, I'm not responding by 4 o'clock. I'm not trying to be difficult; I just didn't know there was a message there.

There is this sort of, you know, "Get with it, pick it up, let's go," that I can't keep up with. I mean, I know you guys don't much care that we have less staff than you do and we do much more of the duties ourselves, but that is what happens. So for me to be able to (a) have enough time to go back and keep checking to see if there's been a request for a meeting – I'm sorry; it's not a request for a meeting. It's: the meeting will be held at this time. We used to have a much more genial relationship, in which it was: "We'd like to have a meeting. When is everyone available?" Now it's: "The meeting will be at this time at this date. If you can't make it, drop dead." They don't actually say that, but it's pretty brusque. Let me put it that way: pretty brusque. So there's that timing thing and the expectation that, one, we will always be available to read messaging and, two, that we are available with sort of less than 24 hours' notice to go and do this.

Now, the point of starting the briefings was actually an agreement between the now Premier, when he was Government House Leader, and myself, and that was because we were getting legislation that was being introduced – at that point the bills were introduced before question period. It was not unheard of – it was actually fairly routine – for the government to then be putting the bills on the floor that afternoon. So we had no idea what was in the bill. We didn't have time to read it, to do any research. The stress levels were enormous. The staff were running around back at the Annex trying to figure out, you know, how to help us.

4:40

They got a lot of debate from me that started out with me picking up the bill and just figuring out how I was going to work my way through 20 minutes in order to stall long enough for someone to come up with some real information back at the Annex and run it over here and give it to one of my colleagues.

For some reason the then Government House Leader was not appreciative of my 20 minutes of careful questioning of the bill. So there was an agreement that the government ministers would make an attempt to brief the opposition members in advance so that that kind of, well, stalling, which was what I was having to do until we could get information, would not need to happen. That's what this came from. But, interestingly, that process of accommodation of two sides and working together has now devolved into this finger-snapping, "Get on with it, toots," kind of command. I do appreciate the offer, but the timelines are very difficult to adhere to and to work with.

The second part of this is that yesterday I spoke about how miscellaneous statutes had disappeared and now the government was doing just statutes amendment acts because the animal, the entity, known as miscellaneous statutes required a negotiation with the Official Opposition – but it's intended in consultation with all opposition members – and there was an ability to veto, to pull out any act that was being changed in miscellaneous statutes. Clearly, the government didn't want to use that particular process anymore, so they've just dropped the "miscellaneous" off the front, and now they have a statutes amendment act, and now it's subject to full debate and hoisting motions.

The problem for us is that to have this on notice on a Thursday, tabled before the House for first reading on a Monday, a briefing at 11:30 on Tuesday, and an expectation that I'm going to be debating this fulsomely and with a good amount of careful thought put into it by Tuesday afternoon is simply an impossibility. It is not that there is any one thing that I adamantly disagree with in this statutes amendment act per se. It's just the whole process that is troubling for me. I like to come in here well prepared. I like to know what I'm talking about. I like to know what you're talking about, and I want to do a good job in here. That's what I'm paid to do, and I'm responsible back to my constituents to be doing that good job, and I can't do that good job under these kinds of timelines.

Am I willing to support a hoist from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona? Yes, in that I'm trying to help drive the point forward. I know that government is in a big hurry and that they don't want to spend any time in here and all of the other stuff that goes wrong for them. You know, with respect, I don't care. I want to do a good job, and I can't do a good job. I do actually get the real bill, and I sit down, and I go through it. I actually compare the whole section, not just the little bit that they give you in a bill that kind of shows you – I look at the whole bill and the context of the sections that it's in so that I actually understand where this is coming from and what the context is.

I can't do that with 16 bills. It just isn't possible in the time that I was given to do that in, so I'm kind of flailing. You know, I was saying, "Well, the freehold mines and minerals: maybe it's this, or maybe it's that; I don't know." Even, you know, when the Government House Leader was quite put out and said, "You know, come on; I did this briefing, and you guys could have asked me any questions," I had no questions to ask because I had not been able to read my way through the bill at that point.

I went into a briefing not having read the bill, not because I didn't want to, but we were busy. We all are here. So I was even flailing around, kind of going, "Okay," and he's talking about this act and that act, and I'm flipping back and forth on the pages trying to find it while he's talking about it. Did I have questions for him? No, because I hadn't even read the bill. Not that he didn't give us the opportunity, but given the timelines involved, no, I didn't have any questions because I didn't have time to formulate those questions with good research that supported them.

In the end, I have to go back to the very sage advice that I was given by a predecessor named Nick Taylor, who was a former leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, who said in his inimitable way: "If you are not 100 per cent behind a bill, don't vote for it. If you don't understand what they're proposing, don't vote for it; vote no." So in this case, although there are things that I really am excited about like the gender neutral language that I've been trying so hard to get – and I'm even excited about the transgender changes. I take the point that it's still under regulations, but, you know, guys, it's hard to drag this government over that line into new concepts, and I'm happy just to have dragged them a little bit over the line. Sometimes I don't get everything that I want.

Sometimes it's a glass half full. In this case, I'm going to take the glass half full.

There are other things that I really don't know, and as a result of not knowing whether it's okay or not and being able to know that because I did the research for it, I'm going to have to vote no to the whole bill, and that really burns me. That really frustrates me. I know that the government has a honking huge majority – well, congratulations – but this is still a democracy, and it does still operate on the principle of alternative points of view and accountability and transparency and, frankly, time. We don't sit in this Assembly very much. Sitting at night isn't always going to give us the extra time to be able to comply with what we're being asked to do by the next day.

I hope there is a better understanding on the other side now of some of the time pressures that have sort of morphed into your daily way of working. I don't know how it got there because it wasn't always there. But the expectations are certainly there now, and it's made it much more difficult – I'll speak for myself – for me to do a good job on this side, and that's really important to me.

So, no, I won't be supporting the bill, and that's why, because I don't understand and know what's in it, and I didn't have time to do it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment HA?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 12 lost]

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 11
Child, Youth and Family Enhancement
Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Campbell: Madam Speaker, I'll move third reading of Bill 11.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Mr. Campbell: Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:50 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, May 8, 2014

Issue 27

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 8, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the eve of our country's National Day of Honour let us stand together to pray for and give thanks to the brave men and women of the Canadian armed forces who participated in the Afghanistan mission. Let us remember the fallen and the families and friends left behind to mourn. Let us pray for the wounded and the injured, who bear the physical and mental burdens of service. And let us add our voices to those of all Canadians on May 9 in expressing our deepest gratitude to all those who have served and to those who are still serving in our armed forces. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and introduce to you and through you over 50 grade 6 students, teachers, and parents from Summitview school in Grande Cache. These students will be among the first to enjoy a modernized high school in Grande Cache, that I announced just a couple of months ago as part of our investment into education under the building Alberta plan. I hope that these future leaders enjoy their visit this afternoon. I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Stony Plain.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 students from Windsor Park school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms Lyster, and parent helpers Ileana Stvelkov and Donna Moorgen. I had the opportunity to talk to these students. Not only are they from a very recognized and well-established school, but these kids are really smart. They asked me for my autograph, which surprised me. Usually my signature has been on a speeding ticket in the past. This is much better. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 17 bright young grade 6 students from St. Matthew Lutheran school from my constituency of Stony Plain. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Gary Skoye, and parent volunteers Mark Smith, Angela Goertz, and Michele Kleijnen. I would now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other important guests, starting with the Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For several years the Legislative Assembly has supported the Edmonton Regional Heritage Fair, held every spring, providing an opportunity for students from schools in the surrounding areas to present projects celebrating Canada's heritage. In 2007 the Legislative Assembly Office initiated an award to recognize participants who demonstrate outstanding achievement in celebrating an aspect of Canadian parliamentary democracy, governance, or political history, with a specific focus on Alberta.

It's now my pleasure to introduce this year's award winner, Hari Abhimanyu, a grade 7 student from Dan Knott school and my constituent, who created an excellent presentation on Emily Murphy because he wanted to research someone who changed the perspective of Canada's federal government to what it is today, an interesting and relevant topic, indeed, Mr. Speaker. Accompanying Hari today are his parents, Mrs. Pichammai Meiappan and, of course, Mr. Muthiah Vinaitheerthan, and Mrs. Suzanne Sparling, his social studies teacher from Dan Knott. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome and congratulations.

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Katelyn Penstone, a recent political science graduate from MacEwan University who will be working as an intern this summer with my communications and correspondence units. It's clear that Katelyn is a bright, capable young Albertan with a strong sense of citizenship. She has already infused the communications and correspondence team with her energy, positive attitude, and willingness to assist everyone around her. We're happy and fortunate to have her onboard. I'm sure there will be no shortage of work as we continue to engage and inform Albertans about the building Alberta plan. I'd ask Katelyn to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour and privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly eight representatives from Glengarry school, part of Edmonton public schools, here at the Legislature in recognition of their 50th anniversary and the grand opening of the Hassan Seifeddine Literacy Learning Centre, which was celebrated in the fall of 2013. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names. I would like to welcome this afternoon Mr. Jim Scott, principal; Mr. Hassan Seifeddine, assistant principal and namesake of the Hassan Seifeddine Literacy Learning Centre; Mr. Patrick Reilly, curriculum co-ordinator; Mr. Abdallah Fares, school council member. Also, representing the grade 6 student leadership with pride are the following four students: Noah Fares, Raeesa Kudoos, Bisan Ibrahim, and Ibrahim Araji. I would now ask that the Assembly please honour my guests with the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour a summer intern that will be working in his office. Her name is Caitlin Bullerkist. She's also studying political science at the University of Alberta and

aspires to go to law school, which are some pretty high ambitions. I believe Caitlin is sitting in the members' gallery. I'd ask her to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction again it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly someone who is well known to many of us. Roberto Noce is a former Edmonton city councillor, a former candidate for mayor in this city as well, and has been a member of numerous boards and associations with the city of Edmonton. Among his many accomplishments Roberto has been invaluable in his contributions to our condo act review process. He's a lawyer, active member of his community, and author of dozens of publications on the intricacies of condo ownership. Roberto is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and a thank you on behalf of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Minister of Health.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ella Schepens, a high school student whose attempts to establish a gay-straight alliance were denied by her school. Ella wanted to establish a GSA in her school to provide an inclusive space for all students. Ella and many Albertans are very disappointed that administrators can deny GSAs. Ella is accompanied by her father, Jim Schepens, and her mother, Mary Anne Bilko. I would now ask Ella, Jim, and Mary Anne to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Isaac Caverhill-Godkewitsch. I have the distinct pleasure of having Isaac work in my office this summer through the Alberta student ministerial internship program. Isaac has a very interesting and broad background, including a master's of global governance degree and extensive experience in public policy and research. This includes work with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations. I would ask that Isaac please rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, this is the last day that we will have the opportunity to recognize Mental Health Week. In that vein, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you two of Alberta's most influential and most respected advocates in the area of mental health. First, I'd like to introduce Mr. Tom Shand, who will be very familiar to many members. Tom served for many years with the Canadian Mental Health Association. He's currently the chair of the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health and also a member of the Lieutenant Governor's Circle on Mental Health and Addiction.

1:40

Mr. Shand is accompanied today by Dr. Austin Mardon, who is well known to many in this House as well. Austin is known for receiving, among other honours, the Order of Canada in 2006 and was one of the first people that I met in my career that had the courage to stand up and talk about his personal experience living with mental illness. Austin and Catherine, his wife, have established the Catherine and Austin Mardon schizophrenia award

and endowed scholarship at the University of Alberta for either a person with schizophrenia or a close family member.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the House and on behalf of Albertans I invite both gentlemen to stand and receive our warm thanks and deepest respect for their contributions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by St. Albert.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a group of volunteers from the fabulous Three Hills area whose church operates a program which brings students from Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma to volunteer here in Edmonton at the U of A hospital and the Cross Cancer Institute. As I call their names, I would ask them to please rise: Murray and Marguerite Baerg, Joni Kuepfer, Kaitlyn Wiebe, Brooke Unruh, and Danielle Loewen. All members of the House, please join me in giving our traditional warm welcome to our guests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Michael Lam. Michael is here today on behalf of Edmonton Economic Development to promote an exciting and landmark event that's being organized in our city. Named Host Edmonton, this three-day event will be Edmonton's first culinary festival and conference. This conference will connect hospitality professionals and home kitchen masters with local and international experts in food, drink, and services. Over two dozen nationally and internationally acclaimed food and hospitality celebrities will also be participating. Michael hopes you will all come out to support this important event, taking place between May 22 and 24 at the Shaw Conference Centre, and eat, drink, and think as we support Edmonton's thriving hospitality industry. Mr. Lam is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Sharon Compton, professor and director of the dental hygiene program at the University of Alberta. Sharon has led health research on oral health for seniors and has also led two Alberta Health Services funded projects. After travelling to South Korea last year, inspired and accompanied by a colleague of hers of Korean descent, Sharon hosted a visiting Korean scholar, Dr. Kim, for six months. Dr. Kim had a chance to immerse herself in the U of A's curriculum and is now an advocate not only for the university's excellent program but for our province as a whole, based on her very positive experience here. This is a great example of the many diverse and varied ways in which our province can build and strengthen international ties. Sharon is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the Associate Minister – Seniors.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of

nine home-schooled students and their chaperones: Rebekka Burt, Dina Gerwing, Carrie Kastelen, and Connie Kennedy. I'd ask the students and their chaperones to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Seniors, followed by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my executive assistant, Remo Padovani. He has provided me great support both in the office and as we travel around the province. I actually inherited Remo from the former Associate Minister of Seniors, and I very much appreciate his knowledge and his wisdom. Remo is soon going to be taking on some new challenges in this building, but it is, truly, always a pleasure working with you, Remo. It's been great. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Education it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jessica Ross. Jessica is a recent graduate of the bachelor of education program at the University of Alberta, and she has been a substitute teacher with the Edmonton public school board for the past year. She will be interning with the Education department for the duration of this summer, and given her background I know that she will be a tremendous asset to that office. I would now ask Jessica to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this last-minute introduction. A good friend of mine is in the members' gallery, Mr. Jerry "ZoomJer" Aulenbach, Mr. Bacon Realtor. A good friend of mine and the entire family, Jerry is a wonderful supporter of the things that happen in Alberta. He's always talking about Alberta across the country. I'd just like to have him stand and have the acknowledgement of the MLAs.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes per statement.

Glengarry School 50th Anniversary and Grand Opening of Hassan Seifeddine Literacy Learning Centre

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, a school is more than bricks and mortar. It's the sum of its entire people, which includes administration, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. It is my honour to rise to recognize and celebrate 50 years of outstanding innovative education as delivered by all those from the past and present at Glengarry school, which is part of Edmonton public schools' rich history.

In 1963 Glengarry school was built as a community school and in 1983 embarked upon a new venture with the inauguration of the Arabic bilingual program, which today proudly serves over 630 students. Glengarry school has an active and thriving school

council, which partners with administration and teachers in an effort to achieve high-quality classroom teaching conditions and learning opportunities for all students.

Building on their firm belief in the power of partnerships and collaboration between school and community, Glengarry school maintains historic and positive relationships with the Canadian Arab Friendship Association of Edmonton, the World Lebanese Cultural Union, the community at large, and business partners and supporters.

Mr. Speaker, Glengarry school can be defined by their legacy of dedication to school and student accomplishments, and in support of this goal and learning innovation the Hassan Seifeddine Literacy Learning Centre was established. The centre incorporates new and emerging technologies with proven resources and approaches to meet and advance the learning needs of students, staff, and the community at large. The Hassan Seifeddine Literacy Learning Centre's namesake is a dedicated advocate, supporter, builder, and leader at Glengarry school, known for his work on delivering bilingual programming locally, nationally, and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, 50 years is a very special anniversary. On behalf of all Albertans and in the Alberta spirit, congratulations to Glengarry school administration, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. Best wishes in the coming year, God bless, and thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Government Policies

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a social contract between the government and the people. Albertans honour this contract every day when they go to work to help build this great province and when they pay their taxes. The government's side of the contract is essentially this: deliver basic public services and make society better while at the same time getting the people the best value for their money and balancing the books and not saddling the next generation with debt.

1:50

Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has not been respecting the people and their contract with the people. Its policies have led to the downfall of one Premier during this session and caused the current Premier to apologize profusely at his party's recent \$500-per-plate fundraiser.

The betrayal of trust, Mr. Speaker, is too much for Albertans to bear any longer. It's too much for parents to bear when they've done their part but can't find affordable child care near home. It's too much for seniors to bear that after building this great province, they have to fight this government to get a drug plan that works for them. It's too much for public-sector workers to bear when this government undermines their Charter rights, threatens their pensions, and refuses to negotiate with them. It's too much for the sick to bear because our health care system can't provide timely access to the care they need when they need it, and it's too much for taxpayers to bear when their money is being wasted and they're going into debt.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want more. They want more than a broken promise and underfunded public services and debt despite our province's great wealth and economy. It's time for Alberta to have not just a strong economy but also a strong society. Alberta Liberals will deliver on that promise to educate our children, care for our sick and elderly, get the schools that we need for our kids,

get the roads and bridges, fund our municipalities, balance the books, and put money in the bank.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to build a strong economy and a strong society based on Liberal values and Alberta values, and it's time to deliver.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're reminded that no question ought exceed 35 seconds, and no answer ought go beyond 35 seconds either.

Let's start with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and question 1.

Federal Funding Programs

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Infrastructure minister stepped down. Now, we welcome lots of people getting into the race to be the last PC Premier – the more the merrier – but there is still work to do. This government has continuously done a poor job of applying for federal infrastructure dollars. Well, here we go again. The previous Infrastructure minister was in charge of finalizing the agreement with Ottawa so that Alberta municipalities could access the building Canada fund, but now he's gone. With the construction season having already begun, can someone assure us that this ball is not going to be dropped?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me first assure the hon. member that many teams have never made it to the finals when they've tried to get past the first game too quickly. I wouldn't assume that the next PC leader will be the last.

I will assure the hon. member that this government will be working very hard to ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to take advantage of the building Canada fund, that we work with the federal government to get the right projects in place for the right reasons at the right time to help continue with the building Alberta plan.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could trust that were true.

Alberta municipalities are entitled to this federal funding, but to get it, they have to rely on the province to finalize an agreement. Now, in his haste to launch his leadership campaign, it appears the Member for Calgary-Hays didn't get around to doing it. His only other competitor in the race, the former Municipal Affairs minister, also dragged his feet when it came to accessing the federal gas tax fund. Why is this government so incompetent when it comes to leveraging our federal government's much-needed and readily available support?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think history will show that for each of these federal funds we have worked very closely with the federal government to ensure that the funds work well for Albertans, that we utilize the funds in appropriate ways, and that we have the appropriate agreements in place to mesh with our spending priorities on behalf of Albertans, and that's what we will do in this particular case.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, but they haven't done that, and it doesn't end there. This government also didn't avail itself of the matching flood mitigation grants in 2012, and the previous, previous Municipal Affairs minister took six months to ask for an advance on the \$3 billion Ottawa pledged to help with last year's floods. The PCs' negligence is a constant source of frustration not only for Albertans but also for our hard-working MPs, who are rightly

proud of the incredible support that the Harper government gives this province. Will the new Infrastructure minister commit that this time around he won't once again drop the ball?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, a lot of what the hon. member just said was not true, and it's unfortunate to categorize the discussions that we're having with the federal government as dragging. In fact, this Premier took it upon himself to meet the new Finance minister at the very earliest opportunity. He and I met with Minister Oliver not that long after he was appointed after the tragic loss of Minister Flaherty. We talked about the flood mitigation money, and we thanked them, actually, for the speed with which they have advanced money that they have never done before because of the lobbying efforts of this government and these ministers.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Finance minister, you didn't ask for the money until December 16, and we know it.

Federal Building Redevelopment Project Management

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it turns out Alberta taxpayers paid at least \$173,000 to not build the former Premier's so-called sky palace. Now, I find that a little odd because usually the cost of not building something is zero. The former Infrastructure minister tabled the documents we asked for on his way out the door to declare for PC leader, apparently to clear the air on how ridiculous this project was and how it came to be, but more questions than ever remain. Who started it? Who stopped it? How did it get so far along? To the new Infrastructure minister: can you help us out with this?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, this is a heritage building in the downtown Edmonton area that we're proud to be restoring for this city. This project has existed since 2008. This is the third Premier and the sixth Infrastructure minister to work on that project. I knew of a private space for the Premier in there, and the former Premier's office dealt directly with the architect for the design there. No residential space is being built there now or in the future.

Ms Smith: To be clear, Mr. Speaker, the sky palace isn't part of our heritage.

The new Infrastructure minister, who also happens to be the old Infrastructure minister and the same Infrastructure minister who was on the job when the sky palace scheme was hatched, claims he cancelled the project. The other former Infrastructure minister, now a PC leadership contender, is also claiming that he spiked it. The fact is that \$173,000 was wasted. Everyone is trying to take the credit, but no one wants to take the blame. To the Infrastructure minister: why can't they get their stories straight?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this hon. member can try and dress it up any way she wants with respect to a sky palace. There's never been a sky palace. There's never been a sky palace. There was a contemplation of a hotel option. That was ruled out as a bad idea a long time ago. It hasn't been built; it won't be built. The building is a heritage building that Albertans will be proud of. It will house hundreds of civil servants, it will house a few legislators, and it will be a place where government can do business with the world.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've had a couple of outbursts during a private member's statement from the government members, and I heard a few outbursts now during an answer the Premier was trying to give. Show a little respect for each other. I'd like to hear the answers, and I'm sure you would, too. I'd also like to hear the questions.

Let's hear the final supplemental from the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Federal Building Redevelopment Project Management (continued)

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it's \$173,000 that's been wasted. The sky palace has become the ultimate symbol of this current PC era. It encompasses everything that this party and this government have become: duplicitous, entitled, secretive, wasteful, and completely out of touch with the priorities of everyday Albertans. It is no wonder they are falling all over themselves to try and put it all behind them, but try as they might, Albertans are not going to forgive and forget. To the Premier. On his last QP as Premier he's apologized for so much already. Will he apologize for this?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I will apologize for what's happened with respect to the federal building because it's an old building. The project management could have been done better, absolutely. As we learned along the way and have done better, we've been able to make sure that some changes that are asked for are not made, including the hundred thousand dollar change that the Official Opposition wanted to the offices being built in the federal building for their offices. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order, please. [interjections] Order, please.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, were you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Anderson: They were lying again, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The point of order has been noted at 1:59:45, and it will be dealt with at the usual time.

Are both sides ready to carry on? [interjections] Good. Let us move on, then.

Third and final main set of questions. The hon. leader.

Premier's Term of Office

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to talk about the Premier if I may. As I mentioned, it is his last day in the Assembly as Premier, and whether or not he drew the short straw in caucus, I guess we'll never know. But I do want to say that he's done the province and his party a service by agreeing to shoulder this load until a new Premier is chosen. It couldn't be easy, but as always he has served with dignity and class. To the Premier: when we are hanging his portrait in the Legislature halls, what is his legacy going to be?

2:00

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've never been one to worry about my legacy. People will think of me as they will. I'm amazed that so many people are concerned about portraits. I think it may be more appropriate, if at all, to have a postage stamp or an asterisk.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, the PCs are closing the Legislature doors this afternoon so they can hit the campaign trail to elect a new leader. They're so desperate to get out of here that they actually voted in favour of a few opposition amendments yesterday. But I know that this Premier is a master of the legislative process, and he respects the role of MLAs in making good laws, so I can't imagine he's all that thrilled at forcing through omnibus bills so his colleagues can stampede toward the exit. To the Premier: why is he allowing debate to be shut down just so his party can go and pick its last Premier?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the House adjourned debate about 4:30 or 5 yesterday afternoon. There was plenty more time for people to speak if they had wanted to speak. I understand it adjourned at 8 o'clock or so on Tuesday evening, again much more time available for people to speak if they wanted to speak. I think the hon. member protests too much. I think they probably want to get out of here a lot more than we do because they're seeing how the table is turning, they're seeing how this government is taking charge, and they're seeing how Albertans are responding to the good work that this government is doing.

Ms Smith: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is right. We'd hate to have another few weeks of question period.

We are about to embark on a long summer recess that will have MLAs out of the Legislature until the end of October. Now, depending on who succeeds as Premier, it could be a year before we're back. It's sad, Mr. Speaker, that the business of governing will once again take a back seat to the government's internal leadership battles. To the Premier: will he be able to make any headway whatsoever on balancing the budget, eliminating wasteful spending, or fixing health care this summer while the rest of his colleagues are busy trying to save their party?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member, first of all, for her very kind comments in her first preamble and then for this question because it allows me to assure Albertans that this government is on the job. This government is doing the work that Albertans elected us to do. Albertans can count on us to build the schools we said we'd build, to continue the work to ensure that primary care is there for Albertans when they need it through family care clinics and primary care networks, and to do all those other things that governance requires. The world is moving quickly. Alberta is not standing still. We're not waiting for a new leader. We're continuing to do the work we were elected to do.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Personal Information Collection by Members

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Premier for serving, and in my last question to the Premier in his term I'm going to give him a tough one. There's been a lot of talk around here lately about the importance of protecting privacy. Today we continue on that theme. Back in 2010 in a PowerPoint presentation a minister of the Crown instructed PC MLAs on how to use government resources to collect the personal information of Albertans for partisan purposes. That person is now Justice minister. To the Premier: how do you justify this abuse of government resources for partisan campaign purposes?

Mr. Hancock: Well, there's one thing that we have in common, Mr. Speaker. I haven't a clue what he's talking about, and neither does he.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, let me enlighten this member. When Albertans come into contact with their PC MLAs, they don't expect their personal information to end up in a PC Party database for use at election time. I highly doubt they would give consent. Well, that's what happens when the PCs never let a voter get away, according to this PowerPoint presentation made to PC caucus in 2010. To the Premier: why does your government so flagrantly disrespect privacy rights while using government resources for partisan campaign purposes?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one thing I know about Albertans is that when they talk to their legislators, they want to know that we listen and that we care. One of the ways that they can know that we listen and care is when we respond to them about the issues they've raised with us. In order to be able to respond to somebody about issues that they've raised with you, you need to keep track of what those issues are so that when a bill comes up, for example, on that topic, you might be able to send a letter or an e-mail or perhaps even a phone call to the individual who contacted you and say: you talked to me about this; I'd like to get back to you on it. I presume that that's what we're talking about in this circumstance.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is right. We do collect information to communicate, but we don't collect information with taxpayer dollars and disclose it to the political party for campaign purposes, as it shows on this PowerPoint. This government has no respect for the fact that there is supposed to be a separation between the government of Alberta and the PC Party of Alberta. In their minds, the government is nothing but a subsidiary of the PC Party. It's this sense of entitlement that led the current Minister of Justice to counsel PC MLAs on the dark art of using government resources to compile lists for use in the 2012 election. Premier, when will this government finally stop using what belongs to the public for their PC purposes?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this hon. member and all Albertans that this government, this caucus, respects the law, respects the private information of Albertans, and does not use private information that's collected for public purposes for private purposes. That would be against the law. We wouldn't do that.

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

Federal Building Redevelopment Project Management (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the wasted \$175,000 on the sky palace, there seems to be an impressive case of amnesia on the part of the entire cabinet. We've heard two directly contradictory stories, and now a senior public servant has been dragged into the PC Party's sad little version of *Game of Thrones*. Meanwhile accountability to Albertans is lost. To the Premier: how can Albertans trust a cabinet that can't even keep its story straight for a session of a mere 27 days?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the fixation of this hon. member and others in opposition is not a fixation that Albertans have. Albertans have very clearly understood what has happened with respect to the federal building. They very clearly understood that mistakes were made. They very clearly understand that there is no residential component being built in the federal building. They very clearly understand that the federal building is a heritage building that will be very useful as a cornerstone of the capital area here in Edmonton, that it will be a signature building for civil

servants, for a few MLAs, and for government. It's a very important part of our future as it is of our heritage.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Calling it a hotel or calling it an apartment: it means nothing. It was always planned as a luxurious hideaway for the former Premier until it wasn't. To the Premier. Albertans have had enough of these conflicting tales from self-interested politicians. One of your members of cabinet or caucus is not giving us the correct information. Why won't you tell us which one that is?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, just because the hon. member says that it's so doesn't make it so. There's never been a luxurious accommodation. There is not accommodation. There will not be accommodation. There was a plan at one point in time to consider whether it might be appropriate to have some overnight space. That was killed as a bad idea. That was a bad idea. We're not going to build it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the timing of this outrageous project's cancellation is important because taxpayers are on the hook for almost \$200,000 because of it. One claims he cancelled it in 2012; one claims he cancelled it in 2014. If we assume that both are correct, why exactly, Mr. Premier, should Albertans trust a government that has to cancel a project over and over and over again? Should they believe you're incompetent or not believe you at all?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, a decent question. You know, we have made mistakes, and we're fixing those mistakes. One of those mistakes is having better controls on a project like this, that is a very complex project, that involves the removal of blue asbestos, renovations of an old building, and very high costs for some of the planning processes. We can do better on that for Albertans, and we will do better on that for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've lost some valuable time due to some outbursts, so I would ask you to look at your preambles and please curtail them, cut them out so we can get through the list here. I have at least 18 members wanting to ask questions.

Let's start now with Calgary-Foothills, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Union Dues Regulation

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 2012 provincial election the PC Party promised Albertans that they would introduce a paycheque protection, transparency, and freedom to choose act, which would make union dues more transparent and would allow union members "the ability to 'opt-out' of the proportion of . . . dues . . . unrelated to collective bargaining and grievance administration." That was taken directly out of the party platform in the 2012 election. My question is to the Premier. When will this government introduce this legislation, which was promised to Albertans in the last election?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Never.

Mr. Webber: Again to the Premier: given that the issue of limiting union dues for political causes and causes not directly

related to improving workplace conditions is highly popular with Albertans, will the Premier commit to bringing this legislation forward to give Albertans what they want?

Mr. Hancock: I'm not sure what the hon. member did not understand about my first answer.

Mr. Webber: To the Premier: will the Premier commit to making union dues transparent before the next election?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a long history of labour peace in the building trades and other areas. We have a significant amount of work that happens in this province, and there's a great deal of competitiveness in that. There is plenty of work for both union members and nonunion members. This is not a big issue for anybody except a very small group of people on the contracting side. It's not a big issue for Albertans. We should do as little as possible to disrupt the very, very strong construction environment we have, which is only held back right now by the costs involved, which escalate if we do anything to disrupt the projects.

Student Assessment

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Calgary board of education is following provincial direction and ditching letter grades and percentages for students in favour of four achievement levels, including "not meeting expectations." It's the same thing that the province pushed on the Battle River school division. Parents, students, and teachers fought back on and said: "No. Thank you." To the Premier. The world does not hand out jobs like your government hands out associate ministries. Why do you think these value achievement levels are better for our kids than percentages and letter grades?

Mr. Hancock: Once again the hon. member is fundamentally wrong in his assumptions. The provincial government has not been telling any school board how to do assessment. In fact, assessment practices are a matter of teachers' pedagogy. Teachers and school boards decide how they're going to do assessments in their schools and in their districts. That is not something that is driven by Inspiring Education or by provincial education policy whatsoever. It's something for teachers in the classroom, working with their principals in their schools, working with their school districts and the parents.

Mr. McAllister: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when this issue was front and centre in Battle River, the former superintendent said that he was just following the philosophy and the direction of Inspiring Education – in other words, the boards are making these changes because the province says that they have to – when are you going to start listening to parents and teachers, who know this isn't good for our kids, and stop listening to your edubabbling educrats? Or do you just not care what parents and teachers think?

Mr. Hancock: I think what I heard in there was about babbling because that's what it was.

Mr. Speaker, how a superintendent might interpret the Inspiring Education report and use it to defend what he or she might be doing with respect to a school board: they have to be responsible for that. I can tell you from intimate knowledge of the Inspiring Education process that Inspiring Education was developed through a thorough consultation across this province with educators and with parents and with members of the community, not by educrats or whatever the hon. member wants to label them. By the way, he shouldn't diminish . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would give the Premier and his Education minister an F for their handling of the education file.

Given that parents are overwhelmingly opposed to these report card changes and that across Alberta they are saying that enough is enough, will you do what the Wildrose would do, Premier, and mandate that report cards in this province include a percentage or letter grade for students in junior high and high school, or will you continue to say one thing and do another, just as you have been since the last election?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's become increasingly apparent that there is no limit to the extent to which this hon. member and that hon. party will go to try and find the disaffected across the province and gather them into a group and try and build it into a strong enough group to get elected. It's not going to work. What they need to do is to look at education in an appropriate way in terms of all of the issues around education; have a positive public policy discussion, as we have had over the last five years in this province; come to appropriate conclusions for the future of our children and grandchildren; and make sure our teachers are well equipped to be in the classrooms with our students to make sure that they can maximize their passion and potential.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Edmonton Sporting Event Hosting Capabilities

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about sport and wellness. The Saville Community Sports Centre, formerly known as the GO Community Centre, was the recipient of a grant from the major community facilities enhancement program. This fiscally sustainable building, that today benefits thousands of children, youths, and adults, would not have been built without the grant. To the Minister of Culture: when will the government reinstate these grants so that project organizers can apply for assistance for large-scale projects all across our great province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The major community facilities program was a great program, about \$280 million, and it finished in 2009-10. As a member of Treasury Board I constantly advocate for more funding for these projects as they continue to build Alberta. We know the value they have for building community and supporting community. In the meantime Budget 2014 has \$66 million in grants that will be available to the nonprofit voluntary sector and \$38 million to the community facility enhancement program. But I will continue to advocate for another program of that magnitude.

Mr. Dorward: To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: what can the province do to support municipalities in securing championship events at the high school, college, and professional levels as even I field questions from local, national, and indeed international sports organizations about the capacity of Edmonton and other places in the province to be sports host cities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for his ongoing and persistent advocacy in this area. Alberta has a strong track record of hosting major events, going back to the 1978 Commonwealth Games and the '88 Olympics in Calgary to the 2001 world track and field games, and we continue that legacy by providing municipalities and bid committees with strong support whenever they have the option or the opportunity to host a major athletic event, whether it's a small event or a World Cup event or an Olympic trial. We have various numbers of programs to do this, and we're one of the best host areas anywhere in the world for that sort of thing.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: I'm glad to hear about the Commonwealth Games because my third question is: what kind of support can the province offer the city of Edmonton during their bid process for the 2022 Commonwealth Games?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth Games that were hosted in 1978 in Edmonton were certainly a watershed event for the history of this city, and the opportunity to host once again in 2022 is one that the bid committee for the city of Edmonton is working very hard on. We are co-operating with that bid committee to put together as much information as possible to make it a successful bid. As far as the actual support for the games themselves, this is the kind of initiative that was envisioned by my hon. colleague the Minister of Finance when we introduced Bill 1 and the Alberta future fund, something that can then provide support for these sorts of initiatives.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Care Facility Restrictions on Family Member Visits

Mrs. Towle: Yesterday I asked this government why it refuses to intervene when family members have been unfairly banned from visiting loved ones in continuing care. The Health minister said that he can't intervene because the case of Shauna McHarg is before the courts. As the minister knows, the only issue before the courts is a simple request for documents through FOIP. When that process wraps up, the ban will still be in place. This is not about FOIP. This is about allowing Shauna to see her mom on Mother's Day and her father on Father's Day. To the Health minister: now that you formally control Alberta Health Services, will you step in immediately and ensure Shauna can see her parents?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it may be that the hon. member thinks that she is in a position to judge the circumstances of a particular case, and she may even believe that if she were in my position, it would be appropriate for her to intervene in an issue that is very specifically in the domain of patient care and management of risk in health care settings. I am not going to pretend to understand the circumstances of this particular case. My responsibility, and I would think the hon. member should agree, is to make sure that the appropriate processes are in place to allow people to raise concerns, to allow them to appeal decisions with which they may not agree, including to the Ombudsman, and to have recourse to the courts . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Mrs. Towle: Your appropriate processes have taken her three years.

Given that I asked the Associate Minister – Seniors about Shauna McHarg being banned from visiting her parents in continuing care and he said, "I'm not that familiar with this case . . . this is the first that I've heard of it" and given that I have copies of an e-mail, which I will table, that Shauna sent to her MLA in 2011 describing her ordeal and given that that MLA just so happens to be this very same Seniors minister, does any of this ring a bell, and will you now step in to help your former constituent battle this three-year, great process that the current minister is asking for?

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think you'll understand that an e-mail that was sent to my office three years ago may not be top of mind, so no, I'm not familiar with this particular case. I understand it is today before the courts, so I can't comment too much further. But what I can tell you is that there are a number of avenues that can be taken for people that find themselves in a position where their visits are restricted. Those include Alberta Health Services patient relations and speaking with management at the particular facility. What I can also tell you is that the protection of the staff and the residents in those is paramount.

Mrs. Towle: The associate minister knows that this is not about safety, and you need to stop hiding behind the courts.

Minister, are you really telling families with loved ones in continuing care that if they end up banned from a facility for speaking out and advocating for their loved one – not for safety reasons; for advocating – this isn't your concern and the only thing these families can do is get a lawyer? Do you really find that acceptable?

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again – I have said it a number of times now – I'm not familiar with this particular case or all the ins and outs, and I wouldn't pretend to be. I'm sure it's rather complex. There have obviously been many discussions, and many different avenues have been explored, and decisions have been made that I certainly wouldn't have the details on. Again, I am absolutely confident that there are appropriate processes in place, an appeal process and discussions that can happen, to ensure that people at least get the opportunity to visit. It may be somewhat restricted, and I think we have to understand why.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Environmental Hearing Participation

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. With the passage of the responsible energy act, who was allowed to speak at oil sands development hearings changed radically to a definition that narrows it to only those "directly and adversely affected," which, for all intents and purposes, means that no coalition, no First Nation, no NGO will ever be able to present to a hearing on any issue contrary to what the oil sands developer wants. To the minister of environment: how is it democratic, fair, or ethical for a government to use its majority to legislate hearings structured so no environmental issues can or will be raised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for the environment.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start off by saying that the member opposite's preamble was incorrect. All First Nations have a chance to be at any hearing. They have the ability through their treaty rights, and they have the ability through

traditional land use if they are directly affected in any environmental hearings that are going on in this province. I can say to you that if you are directly affected, you're allowed to attend those hearings. Those groups might not be able to attend as a coalition, but as individuals or individual organizations they might meet that criteria.

Ms Blakeman: No, they don't have standing.

Back to – well, we'll see who answers. Given that the last Energy minister stated that they were in the process of changing all that for people with different perspectives to bring their case forward and the current Energy minister said that she's opened all the doors and the new regulator will be transparent and open so every voice can be heard, if intervenors don't live across the road, they're sunk. To either minister that would like to answer: do you really think that the whole environment exists just in the property across the road from the development site, static, that the air doesn't move, the rivers don't flow, or emissions don't seep through the soil?

Mr. Campbell: Again, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we have a very good hearing process in the province of Alberta. I say to you that this government is committed to making sure that we look after the environment. The world's eyes are on us. As we continue to extract natural resources and look after our forest industry, we understand that we have to have a very good environmental assessment program in place, and I have full confidence in our quasi-judicial boards that they do a very good job looking after the environment for all Albertans.

Ms Blakeman: With respect, that's hokey.

Back to the minister of the environment. Given that in the Kirby expansion project proposed by CNRL nine parties wanted to be heard, including seven First Nations, an environmental coalition, and one individual, and not one of them was granted status, so no one was able to question or present concerns about the effect of this project on water, on wildlife, on climate change, on tailings ponds, on CO₂ emissions, nothing, how does the minister go to international conferences with a straight face knowing that anyone can look at this process and recognize it . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say with great confidence that Alberta has the strongest regulatory policies in place for the environment as we move forward. I have no problem talking, whether it's in Canada or to international audiences. We have a very good record on the environment and will continue to have a very good record on the environment for all Albertans moving forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Education Funding

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, once again this government has shown, this time through a task force of appointees and PC MLAs, that they don't understand the complexities and challenges in today's classrooms. No teacher can be at their best in a class with 40 students or a class with diverse needs but little to no support. To the Premier: why won't you admit what every parent, teacher, and child already knows, that class size and class makeup determines the quality of education we provide our children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that would not conform with the research that's been done across the world with respect to what actually makes excellence in education. Class size is important, and the demographic makeup of a classroom, including the abilities and skills of children in that classroom, is important. But what really makes a difference is excellence in teaching. All of us who have been in a classroom know that an excellent teacher can handle a class of 40 students in the right circumstances, but in other circumstances a class of 10 students might not be appropriate. But excellence in teaching is always appropriate to the success of our students.

Mr. Bilous: That's baloney, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Speaker, given that this government was elected on a promise of predictable, sustainable funding for our schools, all the way from to kindergarten to grade 12, and given that after two budgets from this PC government our schools have been left to deal with freezes and cuts, which means fewer supports for students and bigger classes, will the Premier accept that to have excellent classrooms, you need to have excellent funding and that the first problem this government should address is the broken promises?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what this hon. member should know, having been in the Legislature and having had the opportunity to peruse the budget, is that the per capita funding for students has not been cut. It is in fact there, and it's demand driven. We fund every single student in this province. Those funds go to school boards, and they have the ability to allocate those dollars to the classroom. We have good funding for students in this province and for the education system in this province. We have a strong education system. We have a strong curriculum, we're going to make it stronger, and we have excellent teachers. That's why the world is coming to Alberta to see how we're doing education.

Mr. Bilous: And that's why we have classes with 30-plus, 40-plus students.

Mr. Speaker, given that teachers want to be supportive, inclusive leaders in the classroom and given that this government has cut the resources they need to play that role, will the Premier explain how suggesting that teachers need to improve without providing them the resources to do so can be seen as anything other than blaming them for this government's failures?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have not cut resources for students in the classroom. In fact, we have maintained those resources, and school boards can allocate those resources appropriately to determine how many students need to be in classrooms and how much support they need around. The hon. member should realize from his question that it's not just about the teacher in the classroom but also about the supports for the teacher in the school and for the students in the school that create a successful education system. Again we come back to excellence in teaching being foundational. Excellence in teaching means ensuring that teachers get a good start in the profession, that they continue their professional development, and that they're supported when they are in trouble.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

University Executive Compensation

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were pleased to see the former advanced education minister and now jobs minister undertake a review of postsecondary executive pay and perks. In many instances these packages are way out of line and well in excess of what public-sector employees should be paid by taxpayers, with some cases over \$1 million. However, the Premier and current advanced education minister has cancelled that review. Does the Premier disagree with the jobs minister and actually believe that taxpayers should be on the hook for these unrestrained and exorbitant compensation packages for university executives?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: What I believe, Mr. Speaker, and what government policy is is that we actually ask members of the community to form boards, and we have board-governed institutions. Those boards have a distinct responsibility with respect to how they hire their chief executive officer, how they get the talent they need to achieve the success that they believe is important for those institutions, how those institutions work together with Campus Alberta to get the best value for money. One of the most significant aspects of their role as board governor is to determine the appropriate level of compensation for the appropriate qualifications of the appropriate person that they want to hire.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given what we've seen transpire in the Premier's office with regard to salaries, severances, and perks, Albertans have become justifiably concerned with how much money they pay to civil servants across the board. Does the Premier really believe that his department as a steward of Alberta taxpayers' dollars has absolutely no role in ensuring that compensation for executives is kept at reasonable levels?

Mr. Hancock: A bit rich, Mr. Speaker, coming from a party who was just a few weeks ago saying that we should be settling things with AUPE and that we should never legislate, we should pay extra, we should be doing everything, and then they come back and say: no; you should actually tell everybody. In fact, I heard even today somebody hollering from across the way about centralization, yet they want everything centralized in government. We have community members on boards making appropriate decisions with respect to how to allocate the resources within the institution. Yes, we're concerned about how that works across the spectrum, and we have those discussions, but we don't interfere with their decisions.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this Premier is not setting the gold standard.

Given that the government loves to say that it needs to dole out these perks to attract top-level talent but given that the president of the Banff Centre, whose expense report includes Hilton hotel stays and \$40 dollar steaks, abruptly left his post last month in spite of these rich compensation packages, how can the Premier honestly justify that these very generous salaries and perks are necessary to attract and retain the top talent?

Mr. Hancock: The answer is in his question, Mr. Speaker. While he goes on slugging people about their expenses without giving any particular context or any way for anybody to assert where he's coming from with respect to that, he then goes on to indicate that

we've lost a top-notch educator, who is moving back to be with his family in Toronto, who is going away for other reasons. I don't know. Maybe if we paid him more, he'd have stayed. I don't know. But the fact of the matter is that to get top talent, you have to look through the world, you have to determine what your goals and aspirations are, and then you have a board who determines and negotiates with that talent the compensation that they need to have to be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

All-terrain Vehicles

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Trespassing by ATVs and side-by-sides continues to be a tremendous problem in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky not only for the property damage but also for the safety and the trespassing rights that we have as landowners. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. What is your department doing to add more trails in the systems in Alberta to prevent some of this damage?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for this important question because it highlights two aspects of my portfolio, one being Active Alberta and the active recreation that trails provide as well as the tourism strategy, in which this is an important component. We're working very actively in collaboration with ESRD, with the various stakeholder groups, both motorized and nonmotorized, who are interested in trail development and trail maintenance. We have a system of trails in the province already that we're seeking to maintain and develop a better status of, and, of course, these groups are also interested in providing new trails to users. This is important work. It is ongoing and something that we're endeavouring to expand in consultation with these various groups.

Mr. McDonald: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Minister. Will you be doing anything to educate these riders as to where they can ride these units?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, we are, and for a number of years along with the departments of Education, Justice and Solicitor General, and ESRD we have worked with the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association to provide the ride with respect program. That program not only teaches safe operation of off-highway vehicles but, indeed, also safety equipment that's required and also stresses very much getting proper permissions for private land use and also the appropriate use when ATVs are being used on Crown lands, which, in fact, is the majority of it. So we're already involved in a program that is doing the kind of education this member is asking about.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Yeah. Thank you, hon. minister. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Will your department be adding any levies to the ATV licences to help compensate for some of these damages resulting from ATVs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Traffic Safety Act states fairly clearly that off-highway vehicles aren't allowed on private property without the owner's permission, and most ATV owners across the province are incredibly respectful. Right now the fee for a licence is \$45. I don't think we're contemplating at all – in fact, I assure you we're not contemplating at all adding on any extra tax, that everyone would have to pay, to compensate for a very small group of people who disrespect the rules. We'll continue to support the minister to my right on education programs to prevent that damage.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Freehold Mineral Rights Legislation Consultation

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend I had the privilege of attending the Freehold Owners Association's AGM. This is a group which represents over 30,000 individuals. For the past 15 years this association has unsuccessfully been trying to work with the government to make meaningful changes to the legislation to protect the rights of the individuals. Now we find out that no one from the association was contacted for input on the changes to the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Act, which directly affects their stakeholders. Can the minister explain why this group wasn't consulted with?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, if the member is talking about the piece of legislation in the bill that we had passed yesterday, I personally spoke with the freeholders' association myself, not only just on the phone but also in my office just a week ago. If there's something that the member is hearing differently, I'd love to sit down and talk to him. I made the point of not only my staff talking to them but me personally doing that because I fully respect the freeholders' association.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I have communications from the president of the association and another board member stating that they only heard of the changes after I contacted them and given this government's claim to have consulted with stakeholders on this matter and others, to the Minister of Energy: just whom did you consult with in that association?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consulted with the president and with Else, and there was another person there with us as well. I made sure, personally, that my staff talked to them and that they were okay. I also personally made sure that I met with them before they had their meeting so that before the legislation was here in the House, from talking to me personally they knew about it and they were okay with it. They confirmed to me in my office that, yes, indeed, they were.

Mr. Hale: They have told me, Mr. Speaker, that they knew nothing of the mineral tax changes that were coming.

Given the government's recent string of apologies, resignations, and other embarrassing gaffes and that this government has still been pushing ahead with their agenda, will the minister once again

take the Wildrose's advice and apologize to the key stakeholders they have ignored and come back to the table to make real, meaningful changes to the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Act working with the freehold association?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to do what I have been doing, having my staff work with them, and then when my staff does that, I personally follow up with them. I fully support the freeholders. They do great work in our province. I will always talk to them myself when we have changes to the legislation because I have respect for them. If that member is hearing something differently, I can't help what he's hearing. Maybe he's hearing wrong. I personally have talked with them myself in my office.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mental Health Service Procurement for Adults

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday I gave a member's statement outlining concerns that I and my constituents in Edmonton-Manning have regarding our mental health care system. In particular, parents or guardians of adult children with mental health issues are restricted from seeking help for them. Regardless of the adult children's state of mind they are required to come forward and ask for help themselves. My question is to the Minister of Health. Are there policies in place or being considered to assist guardians seeking treatment for their adult children with mental health issues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question and his significant contribution to Mental Health Week in Alberta by virtue of this question and his member's statement earlier this week. Indeed, mental health issues can be very difficult for families and guardians, and I appreciate that all Albertans want to know how they can best help someone in need, particularly a family member. The Mental Health Act contains options for a parent or guardian to work through the legal system to request that a person be taken to a mental health facility to have their mental health status examined by physicians. In most cases this is a straightforward process, but in some cases . . .

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: To the same minister: what you are saying is not enough. The legal process is very lengthy and complicated. Patients give up before they get the help that they need. What steps are you taking now to change the process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The situations that we hear about in our day-to-day work as MLAs can be heart-wrenching, but of course we have to achieve a balance between observing the rights of the individuals in question, who may be suffering from mental illness, and our desire, our heartfelt desire, to provide help when they need it and reach out to them at the earliest opportunity. Our government and our health care partners are committed to suicide prevention, prevention efforts,

and other programs, as the hon. member will know. The introduction of community treatment orders a few years ago . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: Again to the same minister: is there a way to make the process less complicated so that Albertans have easier access to help?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always looking for ways to make the process easier. The hon. member's question, of course, refers to a situation wherein family members or parents or guardians are so concerned that they actually have to seek help, quite often in a very difficult situation. The more important issue, in my view, is what we are doing to prevent mental illness, how we are using the resources that we have to get them to people when they need them and when they are receptive to receiving the help.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. The time for Oral Question Period has expired.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: You have two minutes each. Let's start with Edmonton-Decore, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark. Oh, I'm sorry. They have already gone. My apologies. It's Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Thank you.

Great Kids Awards 2014

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever we think of leaders, we often think of adults. However, we must also think of Alberta's youth. Each year thousands of children and youth do great things at home, at school, and in their communities, and they deserve to be recognized for their exceptional achievements. That's why today I'm pleased to celebrate the Great Kids awards and all the young leaders across Alberta. For the 14th year the province recently presented the Great Kids awards to 16 children and youth for their outstanding determination, generosity, and compassion. While these award winners are between the ages of five and 18, they all lead by example through their selflessness, kindness, and courage.

One example, Mr. Speaker, is an award winner from my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky, 16-year-old April Wyant. April is an optimistic, self-motivated young lady. She has had a childhood full of challenges and eventually was living on the streets. One day April decided to change her life, and she stopped using drugs and alcohol and enrolled back in school. Since then she has been an honour student every year and has earned several academic awards and is known as a leader in her classroom. I'm very proud of her for overcoming the odds and making a better life for herself.

As a government we support the success of these and all Alberta's youths. The Great Kids award is one way that we are investing in families and communities to build Alberta, but the youth themselves are the real winners in the future of this province. Mr. Speaker, today I encourage everyone to join our government in celebrating the award winners and nominees of the Great Kids awards.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Medicine Hat.

National Day of Honour

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Friday, May 9, has been designated as the National Day of Honour in recognition and commemoration of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Like all Canadians, Albertans saw our men and women of the armed forces go off to Afghanistan 12 years ago with a mixture of pride and sadness, pride because Canada was joining an international effort to address a threat to our nation and to our closest allies, sadness because we knew that military operations cannot happen without lives being affected. At the very least it meant upheaval for military families, that there would be many households missing a family member for a period of months if not years. Even then, no matter how optimistic we might have been, we realized the likelihood that some brave Canadians would not be coming home at all, that Canada, too, would have to pay the age-old price of war.

Twelve years later we are humbled by the efforts of our troops to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. War teaches no easy lessons, Mr. Speaker. We are eternally grateful to the men and women who have endured those difficult truths. A thank you hardly seems enough. But we have to accept that for those Canadian individuals and families who have lived through their portion of the conflicts, a thank you must be the starting point.

Mr. Speaker, this past March, at the conclusion of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, we announced free admission for Canada's military personnel and their families to Alberta's provincial museums, historic sites, and interpretive centres. All they need to do is to show their CFOne card to enjoy free, unlimited regular admission from now on. It's a small gesture, one that we hope will convey our thanks to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'm so sorry to interrupt. Your time has expired. I realize how sensitive the topic is, but I'm bound to enforce the rules.

Let's go on with Medicine Hat, please.

Innovation in Alberta

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans have an entrepreneurial spirit, and the best and the brightest people in the world call Alberta home. We don't let anything stand in the way, not even government. This isn't only in research and business but also in the arts, nonprofits, and people in general. Albertans have developed SAGD for oil sands development. There is work going on in nanotechnology, and we've seen success stories in health, with Cold-FX coming from Alberta, and in rural development, with the rural Alberta development fund. While there are many good projects that have had government involvement, there are many more achievements that are just the simple result of grit and determination, entrepreneurship, and sometimes even just a little luck. They have had nothing to do with government.

This is what makes the PC government's approach to innovation so troubling. They think that government has the answers. They think that centralization is the way to go. They think that appointing a committee is going to solve all their problems. Then they appoint another committee and then a task force and then a panel, and then they write a report, and then there's a cabinet shuffle, and the whole thing starts all over again.

This is not to say that everything is awful. Congratulations on the new economic dashboard are deserved, and there has been a positive reception from innovators and the business community.

But there was troubling news a couple of weeks ago when the Premier admitted that his advisory panel never met, not once. We don't need to have more government, but we need to have accountability. We have to trust Albertans, and we have to believe in them. One thing to keep in mind with the success stories of today is that they are not because of government. The truth is that despite government sticking their hands into everything, Albertans are still succeeding.

It's time for this PC government to take a step back, get their house in order, and allow Alberta entrepreneurs and innovators to succeed. We know that they can, and we know that they will. The sky isn't falling, but you would have to be foolish to think that we can't do better with the more than \$8 million invested yearly. Sometimes we can do better by having government do less.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Animal Protection Legislation

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with regret that I rise today to give the last member's statement of this session. The Premier decided that he doesn't want to deal with the necessary laws and regulations that govern Alberta. No surprise here. We have seen the current government killing Albertans' access to governance for a while now.

As I walk out of the opposition lounge, there's a photo hanging on the wall, dated 1912. The photo shows hon. members doing something that rarely happens nowadays. They are debating. They are together in a Chamber discussing the future of Alberta. Those individuals worked hard governing, not balancing media and backtracking on comments and promises.

One such lost piece of legislation was my Bill 205, the Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014. I am fully aware that my current status as an independent member is the reason that this bill never saw a second reading. I also know that the Minister of Justice and Sol Gen has commented on it extensively. I know that my bill will be killed and is going to be killed and another government bill bearing a remarkable similarity will be introduced soon.

2:50

Despite the fact that I was made an MLA by my constituents, the government doesn't think I'm one of the cool guys anymore and has ensured that I cannot pass a bill which, if passed in the last couple of days, would have been effective in punishing the offender that caused me to draft the bill to begin with. He was very recently caught, but because of the political ridiculousness of the last year or so offenders such as this fellow will get a slap on the wrist. Closing down session effectively kills the voices of thousands of Albertans. I'm willing to bet that they are tired of this treatment.

This is what makes me a very sad man.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three petitions to present on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Currie, with over 1,500 signatures, that encourage the Parliament of Canada not to pass legislation that would legalize prostitution.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: I have two sets on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and leader of the Liberal opposition. I have the appropriate number of copies of a PowerPoint presentation that was made to the PC caucus which talks about collecting data, sending out surveys, always uploading information of the people to the database, and then later on it talks about using that same database as your best get-out-the-vote resource. Yup, pretty interesting stuff.

May I continue with my own tablings? Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I have three or maybe four. The first one is backing up my quotes from the previous Energy minister that were given during my question, suggesting that people with different perspectives would be allowed to bring their case forward to the hearings for new oil and gas developments.

The second is a copy of a letter that went back to the Oilsands Environmental Coalition which lists five different criteria that they would have to meet in order to be allowed into the hearing, which, frankly, is very difficult to meet unless you live across the road.

My final tabling is a copy of the Alberta Energy Regulator rejection which lists the statements of concerns that were filed – and I'm glad that the minister of environment is still here – by Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation, Chard Métis Society and Chard Métis Dene, Whitefish (Goodfish) Lake First Nation, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, Cold Lake First Nations, and Fort McMurray First Nation, all of which were denied the ability to speak at the hearing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you. I have in my hand a tabling that I'll put to the Legislature today from Shauna McHarg, dated April 26, 2011, where she is e-mailing the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. She goes through in very in-depth detail exactly what her concerns are with regard to the banning, talks about the process, the ombudsman, and all of the processes she's been through. She even talks about the multitude of Health ministers that she went through, including when you were Health minister, Mr. Speaker, and the ongoing process and the ongoing fight of over four years to resolve the banning situation.

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. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, a letter dated May 7, 2014, from Robert Blakeman, business manager, International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers local 720, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regarding the Sims report; a letter dated May 6, 2014, from John Desrosiers, business manager, Construction and General Workers' Union local 92, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regarding the Sims report; a letter dated May 5, 2014, from Ian Robb, president/administrator of Unite Here local 47, president of Northern Alberta Building Trades Council, chair of Building Trades of Alberta camp committee, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regard-

ing the Sims report; a letter dated May 6, 2014, from Wade Logan, business manager, International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers local 110, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regarding the Sims report; a letter dated May 6, 2014, from Bruce Moffatt, business manager and CEO, International Union of Operating Engineers locals 955, 955B, and 955C, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regarding the Sims report; a letter dated May 6, 2014, from Brett McKenzie, executive director, General Presidents' Maintenance Committee for Canada, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regarding the process concerning the Alberta construction labour legislation review; and a letter dated May 6, 2014, from John Tackaberry, business manager, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades local 177, to hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, regarding the Sims report.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there was a point of order raised by Airdrie just before 2 o'clock, but the hon. Member for Airdrie has since withdrawn that point of order. So we have none to deal with.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to advise the House that the government business for the spring sitting has now been completed. Therefore, pursuant to Government Motion 9 the Assembly stands adjourned.

The Speaker: Government Motion 9 simply says that we're going to be adjourned until October 27 of 2014, so that is so ordered.

We are done. Congratulations.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:57 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 9]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 2nd Session (2014)

Activity to May 08, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Savings Management Act (\$) (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Mar. 3, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 47-50 (Mar. 4, 2014 eve.), 84-85 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft.), 146-54 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 184-87 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 217-18 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 226-28 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 231-34 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2014; SA 2014 cS-2.5]

2 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 84 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 154-56 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187-88 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c2]

3 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)

First Reading -- 62 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 143-45 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 187 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 218 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 234 (Mar. 12, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c3]

4 Estate Administration Act (Kubinec)

First Reading -- 62-63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 145-46 (Mar. 10, 2014 eve.), 184 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 191-93 (Mar. 11, 2014 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 229 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 250 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft.), 330 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 cE-12.5]

5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 119 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 174 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft.), 188-90 (Mar. 11, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 218-20 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft.), 228-29 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 230 (Mar. 12, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 13, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 13, 2014; SA 2014 c1]

6 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Minister of Municipal Affairs)

First Reading -- 300 (Mar. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 330-31 (Mar. 20, 2014 aft.), 417-21 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 493-503 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 522-23 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 657 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c5]

- 7 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 488-93 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 523 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 657 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2014 c6]
- 8 Appropriation Act, 2014 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 488 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 519-20 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 523-27 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 559-62 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft.), 563-80 (Apr. 22, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 610-23 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft.), 633-38 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 24, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 24, 2014; SA 2014 c4]
- 9 Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 484 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 520-21 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 544-59 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft.), 625-31 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft.), 638-57 (Apr. 23, 2014 eve.), 711-17 (May 5, 2014 eve., passed), 717-18 (May 5, 2014 eve., referred to Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future)
- 10 Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014 (Horner)**
First Reading -- 484-85 (Apr. 16, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 522 (Apr. 17, 2014 aft.), 559 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft.), 580-96 (Apr. 22, 2014 eve., passed on division), (May 5, 2014 eve., referred to Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future)
- 11* Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014 (Bhullar)**
First Reading -- 541 (Apr. 22, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 623-25 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft.), 673-79 (Apr. 24, 2014 aft.), 718-20 (May 5, 2014 eve.), 737-40 (May 6, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 745-55 (May 6, 2014 aft.), 757-58 (May 6, 2014 eve.), 779-82 (May 7, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 787 (May 7, 2014 aft., passed)
- 12 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 693 (May 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735-37 (May 6, 2014 aft.), 740-45 (May 6, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 758 (May 6, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 759 (May 6, 2014 eve.), 782-87 (May 7, 2014 aft., passed)
- 13 Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (Olesen)**
First Reading -- (May 6, 2014 aft., passed)
- 201 Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act, 2014 (Kubinec)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 123-34 (Mar. 10, 2014 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship)
- 202 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 63 (Mar. 5, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 264-79 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., defeated on division)
- 203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 249 (Mar. 13, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 352-61 (Apr. 7, 2014 aft.), 444-50 (Apr. 14, 2014 aft., passed)
- 204 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (MLA Public Interest Fee Waiver) Amendment Act, 2014 (Barnes)**
First Reading -- 263-64 (Mar. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 450-52 (Apr. 14, 2014 aft.), 694-707 (May 5, 2014 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Distress and Neglect) Amendment Act, 2014 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 417 (Apr. 10, 2014 aft., passed)

Pr1 Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014 (Hale)

First Reading -- 609 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 737 (May 6, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 758 (May 6, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 758 (May 6, 2014 eve., passed)

Pr2 Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014 (Calahasen)

First Reading -- 609 (Apr. 23, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 737 (May 6, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 758 (May 6, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 758-59 (May 6, 2014 eve., passed)

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The main estimates (budget) for 2015 are being considered in the legislative policy committees. Below is a list of ministries and the schedule of debate. Links to transcripts are provided as they become available. Executive Council estimates are scheduled for two hours; ministry debates are scheduled for three hours.

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Energy	Resource Stewardship	April 9 evening
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Infrastructure	Alberta's Economic Future	March 19 evening
Innovation and Advanced Education	Alberta's Economic Future	April 8 afternoon
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